

Mean Time

by Carol Ann Duffy

'Poetic Voices' Study Guide for
AS/A Level AQA English Language
and Literature

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Teacher's Introduction

This guide is designed to meet the requirements of the *Poetic Voices* module which is part of the AQA's AS and A Level English Language and Literature, for teaching from September 2015 onwards. It will focus on the following selection of poems from *Mean Time*, by Carol Ann Duffy:

- 'The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team'
- 'Nostalgia'
- 'Before You Were Mine'
- 'Beachcomber'
- 'First Love'
- 'Valentine'
- 'The Biographer'
- 'Litany'
- 'Stafford Afternoons'
- 'The Cliché Kid'
- 'Small Female Skull'
- 'Never Go Back'
- 'Close'
- 'Mean Time'

The Assessment Objectives

The activities in this booklet will enable the students to address the relevant assessment objectives on both the AS and A Level courses:

Assessment Objective	Activities in this resource targeting the AO
AO1: use of literary and linguistic terminology as part of fluent, coherent analysis of the poems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An introduction to key literary and linguistic terms• Questions on each poem focusing on specific literary and linguistic techniques
AO2: analysis of the meaning of the poems and their key themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An analysis of the way each poem presents time, place, people and relationships• Questions on each poem, analysing its key themes and ideas
AO4: making close links between poems – ASSESSED AT AS LEVEL ONLY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comparative questions, comparative essay plans and comparison table

Other key features of the resource:

1. A student-friendly introduction to the skills required in this paper
2. A brief biography of Carol Ann Duffy and the style and themes of *Mean Time*
3. An overview of the poems studied, comparing the key ideas and techniques they have in common
4. A guide to how to write a comparative essay, including a student-friendly mark scheme
5. Sample essay questions for AS and A Level, including sample answers
6. Suggestions for further reading
7. Suggested answers for all activities

NB Throughout, suggestions and activities for comparing poems across the collection have been provided. Please note that comparison (AO4) is only assessed at AS Level for this set text, but that A Level students might find these notes helpful in their exam when choosing poems to analyse alongside the named poem.

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Some views expressed in this resource are the author's own interpretation of a certain idea or concept and may not reflect the opinions of others. In particular there is some offensive language in 'Litany' and 'The Cliché Kid'.

Student Introduction – ‘Poetic Voices’

You will study 14 poems from Carol Ann Duffy’s 1993 collection, *Mean Time*. This is a detailed knowledge of these poems, as any of them could be set in the exam. The following are key features of the collection which you would be expected to comment on:

- the portrayal of **time**: memories, reconstruction of the past, coming to terms with switches from the past to the present within the poems
- the significance of **place**: the importance of particular settings to the speaker and the things they bring
- the description of people and their **relationships** as conveyed through the portrayal of particular ways of talking or acting in the poems
- the exploration of **events** through poetic techniques such as flashback and the reconstruction of events from memory

AS Level

- At AS Level, ‘Poetic Voices’ is part of Paper 1, **Views and Voices**.
- This paper is made up of **two questions** – one compulsory question on your poetry set text, such as Carol Ann Duffy’s *Mean Time*, and one compulsory question on your prose set text, such as *Of Mice and Men*.
- The paper is **1 hour 30 minutes** long and it is worth 50% of the marks for AS Level.

A Level

- At A Level, ‘Poetic Voices’ is part of Paper 1, **Telling Stories**.
- This paper is comprised of **three questions** – one compulsory question on your poetry set text (10 marks – closed book), one question from a choice of two on your prose set text (10 marks – closed book), and one question from a choice of two on your poetry set text, such as Carol Ann Duffy’s *Mean Time* (10 marks – open book).
- The paper is **3 hours** long and it is worth 40% of the marks for A Level.

Summary of differences between ‘Poetic Voices’ at AS and A Level

- You must bring a clean copy of the poems with you into the A Level exam. In the AS Level exam, you can bring your texts with you, but the poems specified in the question will be printed in the exam.
- In the A Level exam you will be given a choice of two questions in this section.

Typical AS Level exam question

Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays love in ‘Close’ and ‘Mean Time’.

Typical A Level exam question

In ‘Litany’ and one other poem of your choice, examine how attitudes to childhood are conveyed.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

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Methods of language analysis

In your essays on the poems, you will need to analyse Duffy's language choices in linguistic terminology listed below:

- **phonetics, phonology and prosodics** – these are features related to sound that Duffy uses to create certain emotional, visual or symbolic effects. Carol Ann Duffy uses onomatopoeia, alliteration or rhyme to create certain patterns.
- **lexis and semantics** – when studying the poems, the most important aspect is Duffy's WORD CHOICES. Duffy mixes metaphorical language and elaborate colloquialisms designed to recreate the speaking voice.
- **grammar** – when discussing word choices, you must label them using the correct grammatical term. For example, you might write about how Duffy uses the ABSTRACT NOUN 'fear', or the STATIVE VERB 'pretending' to portray the artificiality of a poem. In addition to these, you need to comment on sentence structures and functions. For example, how Duffy uses MINOR SENTENCES to create a sense of panic in a poem.
- **pragmatics** – you will also consider how Duffy communicates with her readers. Her word choices imply about the standpoint of her audience. The poem 'Litany' is a good example of the idea of politeness to the subtle use of implication.
- **discourse** – this includes the analysis of aspects of literature such as the structure, as well as the use of speech features and any other visual aspects. Duffy uses these in order to communicate her meaning to the readers.

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Carol Ann Duffy: Background

Carol Ann Duffy's life

Carol Ann Duffy was born on 23 December 1955 in Glasgow, Scotland. She was one of four children and her family are Roman Catholic. Her family moved to England when Duffy was six; here her father stood as a Labour candidate in 1983, but was not elected. From an early age, Duffy wrote poetry and always intended to be a writer.

She was the first woman to be elected to the position of Poet Laureate in 2009. Currently, she holds the position of Professor of Contemporary Poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is well known for her feminist views and her open discussion of her lesbianism. Carol Ann Duffy's daughter Ella was born in 1995.

Her work

Duffy is best known for her prizewinning poetry collections such as *Standing Female* (1987), *Mean Time* (1993), and *Rapture* (2005). Her poems focus on a range of relationships, identity and violence, often from a feminist standpoint which challenges what has been presented in canonical literature within the patriarchal establishment. The poems mix colloquial language with more academic references. The accessibility of the work makes it popular for study in schools and colleges.

Duffy is also a dramatist, and in 2015 she adapted the medieval play *Everyman* for the stage. It premiered at the National Theatre and was broadcast live to cinemas across the UK.

Poetic Voices

Look out for the following features which are typical of Duffy's poetic voice when writing in her collection:

- reflection on memories from childhood and youth from the point of view of a sometimes embittered adult persona
- discussion of the way language is used to shape our view of the world and ourselves
- meditations on the passing of time and its corrosive effects
- a study of the volatile and temporary nature of love
- close attention paid to everyday domestic details
- mixing of colloquial, sometimes taboo language with more lyrical imagery
- free verse, unrhymed
- experimentation with the form and structure of the poems, including a mix of stanzas
- intertextuality – references to other literary works
- some lyric poems – the poet uses 'I' to describe her intense emotional experience
- some dramatic monologues (e.g. 'The Biographer') – the poem is told from the perspective of a defined character
- images of darkness and turmoil often juxtaposed with humour

Other techniques commonly used by Duffy include:

- personification
- metaphor
- direct speech
- frequent switching of tense

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Poems Studied

Poem	
'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team' – DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE from the perspective of a middle-aged man who is disappointed by his current life and reminisces about his more successful school years.	disillusion
'Litany' – a poem in which the speaker remembers how, as a child, she shocked her friends by saying a swear word.	childhood power of between
'Nostalgia' – a poem about early mercenaries who leave their home in search of fortunes, but experience loneliness and longing; the concept of 'nostalgia' is thus introduced into other people's consciousness.	time, me
'Stafford Afternoons' – a child leaves her familiar street and goes to explore the woods, but is shocked by an encounter with a stranger.	memory
'Before You Were Mine' – the poet looks at photographs of her mother as a young woman and tries to imagine what her life must have been like before she became a mother.	the relat children
'Beachcomber' – the poet remembers a day she spent at the beach as a child.	childhood
'First Love' – a LYRIC poem in which memories of a past lover are triggered by a dream.	memory
'Valentine' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona uses the onion as a symbol of the pain of love as well as a metaphor for the enduring loyalty.	romantic
'The Biographer' – a DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE in which a man writing a biography of a writer realises that he can never measure up to his subject.	disillusion
'The Cliche' – a DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE in which a person appears to be telling their psychoanalyst about traumatic past experiences which have shaped their life.	the past relationsh the relat children
'Small Female Skull' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona contemplates her mortality.	death, tim
'Never Go Back' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona returns to a place where she used to live and reflects on how much she and it have changed.	time, me
'Close' – a LYRIC poem about the emotions involved in the breakdown of a romantic relationship.	romantic
'Mean Time' – a LYRIC poem in which the speaker expresses her regrets about the end of a relationship.	romantic

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'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Pops'

Summary and Analysis

This life seems characterised mostly by disappointment, as the man reflects on his wife and children and implies that they do not appreciate him. Time is the enemy of the poem, as it robs the man of the triumphs of his youth. The male persona is Carol Ann Duffy, and the dramatic monologue is written as if it were used by her to expose a speaker's preoccupation with power and achievement.



To help you...

For more context, research the BBC radio and television quiz show...

Stanza one

The poem is written from the perspective of a middle-aged man who is recalling his schooldays in the 1960s. This was a time of hope in Great Britain as the country experienced a cultural and economic resurgence after the years of post-war austerity. The man remembers the popular songs from his youth, his first feelings of sexual attraction and the excitement of those years.



Questions

1. What type of **mood** is conveyed through the titles of the songs in the poem?
2. Give two examples of **onomatopoeia** and comment on the effect they have.
3. Find words and images that suggest the purity and innocence of youth.
4. How is the sense of a speaker's voice created in this stanza and why? Identify this **conversational tone**.
5. Find a **simile** that is used to portray the boy's sexual awakening.
6. Give an example of **metonymy** from the stanza and explain its effect.

Stanzas two and three

The man is clearly intent on dwelling on his time in the classroom, where he felt confident. His childhood is presented as a time of potential and energy, while the young boy he was is remembered as a time of hope. He felt confident as he could answer all the questions as part of his quiz team at school. The questions are phrased in the present tense ('The Nile rises in April'), suggesting the speaker's confidence and also that these facts are reassuring to him because they will never change, unlike the world which has changed dramatically over the years. The poet uses proper nouns such as 'Nelson Drive' to create the sense of the speaker feeling at ease in a familiar setting. Churchill and Nelson, two important leaders, are used ironically as a reminder of the speaker's achievement during this time.



Questions

7. Find examples of how the following features are used in stanza two to convey confidence and energy:
 - a minor sentence
 - direct speech
 - listing
 - two imperatives
8. Find examples of how the speaker is emphasised by enjambment at the beginning or end of lines.
9. Find examples of the use of repetition.

In stanza three...

8. What is implied about the poetic persona's relationship with his parents?
9. How is the boy's pride of his achievements conveyed in this stanza?
10. Find examples of how **colour imagery** is used in this stanza and explain its impact.
11. How are the persona's feelings of security and sense of belonging in the classroom conveyed?

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Stanza four

The speaker seems compelled to relive these memories of his successful past, feeling a more ordered, predictable world than in his present life. He wants to regain the feeling he once admired. He is portrayed as disappointed by his family and lacking feelings of affection. Being powerful and victorious as he once used to be, the speaker now has a 'boss' over him.



Questions

12. How does Duffy create a sense of tone and perspective in this stanza?
13. How is **antithesis** used to convey the idea that the poetic persona has changed?
14. What **metaphors** are used to illustrate the persona's contempt for his family?
15. What **metaphor** is used to portray the fact that his family are embarrassed by his success?
16. What do you think the persona's former title as 'captain' might symbolise?
17. Why do you think that the **minor sentence** 'My Country' is repeated?
18. What is the effect of the **list** of quiz questions in this stanza?

Comparisons to other poems

1. Compare the presentation of childhood experiences in this poem to the way they are presented in 'Litany' and 'Stafford Afternoons'.
2. How are attitudes towards the past presented here in comparison to 'Never Mind'?
3. In what ways are the destructive effects of the passage of time also conveyed in 'Mean Time'?
4. What are the similarities and differences between the poetic persona of this poem and that of 'The Biographer'?

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'Litany'

Summary and Analysis

Events: The poem describes a gathering of female friends or neighbours at the house of the persona's mother. They make polite conversation and compare the items they like in a shopping catalogue. The persona tells the gathering about a boy in the playground... told me to find a friend. The use of taboo lexis creates a sense of shock from the point of view of the adult women as 'language embarrassed them'. The mother feels embarrassed, apologises to the women and washes the mouth with soap as punishment.

The presentation of time: the main action of the poem is set in the past, the persona's childhood. At the end of the poem, she switches to the present, the adult who remembers one of her first experiences of rebellion against her social set.

The importance of place: Duffy sets the action of the poem in her mother's home, portrayed as somewhat stifling and repressive, where formality and good manners and expression is censored. Using enjambment, Duffy draws attention to the place of gathering, an idea emphasised as she uses religious imagery to describe the superficial talk of material goods as a 'litany'.

People and their relationships: The persona describes the clothes, the mother's friends in a way that makes them sound conventional and obsessed with appearances. This futile attempt by the women to maintain a façade of propriety is illustrated by the simile 'A tiny ladder / ran up Mrs Barr's American Tan leg, / sly like a rumour.'

Their speech is portrayed as focusing on trivial topics, revealing their materialistic values as subjects are avoided, as suggested by the metaphor 'the terrible marriages'.

Stanzas and Questions



Questions

- The discussion of the women centres around the goods they are interested in, described as a 'soundtrack' and a 'litany'.** What is the effect of using the word 'soundtrack' here and what is the effect of using the word 'litany'?
- A litany is a list associated with prayer.** What does this use of religious imagery suggest about the values of these women and the importance they give to the goods they are discussing?
- The women are presented as greatly valuing their appearance and material possessions.** Choose out two quotations from stanzas one and two that illustrate this and discuss their effect.

The atmosphere of the gathering appears to be tense and there is a sense that the women are not discussing their problems openly as they feel that they have to keep up appearances. Communication is guarded and stifled, reduced to polite chatter as they seem inhibited by social conventions. There appear to be a great deal of emotional closeness between them even though we are told they are just friends. The women appear to be frightened of revealing too much about their lives, perhaps due to fear of scrutiny and emotional vulnerability.

- Comment on the following lines and how they convey the ideas about appearances, material possessions, adjectives, etc.), poetic techniques (e.g. enjambment, metaphors, similes, metaphors):
 - 'A tiny ladder / ran up Mrs Barr's American Tan leg, / sly like a rumour.'
 - 'The terrible marriages cracked'
 - 'sharp hands poised over biscuits'
 - 'The wicker chair would have been a good idea'
 - 'Lanterns of the night'
 - 'An old woman's face'

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Stanzas three and four

The focus in these stanzas changes from the description of the women to the thought of the child listening to their conversation. The child is presented at first as passive yet curious about the conversation.



Questions

- What is the effect of the **noun** 'code' in line 5? This is the code I learn from her relationship with her mother, present here?
- Why do you think the **verb** 'pounding' is emphasised by **enjambment** in line 6? What does the persona's position in a social gathering?
- The woman's conversation is presented as superficial and limited, confined to the topic of the wasps. How is this conveyed through **listing**?
- What might the wasps **symbolise**? What is the effect of the **images**?

The child is portrayed as curious, wanting to push the limits of the conventional world. She wants to break free from the restrictions placed on her, but struggles to find a way to do so.

- What might the butterfly **symbolise**?
- What is the effect of **personifying** the butterfly as having 'stammered' words? What word belong to?

In stanza four, the persona takes control of the social gathering and commands attention with the word she heard at school.

- What is the effect of the **direct speech** from the child and the use of 'I' in the stanza?
- What do the **adjectives** 'thrilled' and 'malicious' suggest about her feelings? What do the swear words?
- Find a **simile** and a **minor sentence** used to portray the women's reaction. What effect.

The mother is forced to apologise for her daughter's behaviour. Her response to the child is another list of names, this time of their names.

- How does the use of **direct speech** from the mother contrast her daughter's speech?
- How is the change in the relationship between mother and daughter?

The child is punished for breaking the rules of polite society and embarrassing the mother. The mother's desire to be seen by the other women as a strict disciplinarian is portrayed. The importance of keeping an appearance of respectability, which is a key theme of the poem, is to have her mouth washed with soap.

- How is the mother's embarrassment portrayed here?
- The last three lines are in the **present tense**. What do they reveal about the persona's memory, from the perspective of an adult? Which **verb** is used to portray the memory is for her and why do you think this is the case?
- The line ends with the **minor sentence** 'The taste of soap'. What is the effect of the **imagery** and how does it present the process of memory? Why might this be viewed as appropriate by the persona's mother?

Comparison: 'Poetic Voices' and 'Captain...'

Comment on the similarities and differences between the two poems in terms of:

- the portrayal of childhood memories
- the relationship between children and parents
- the effect of time on the speaker

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'Nostalgia'

Summary and Analysis

The poem is a reflection on the term 'nostalgia', which is a term used to describe a desire to return to a familiar place, such as one's home. Unlike many poems that deal with the experiences of a particular woman, this poem is not autobiographical in tone. Instead, it is set in the distant past and describes the experiences of travellers who left their home in search of their fortune ('mercenaries'), who become labelled as 'nostalgia'. The word 'nostalgia' comes from the Greek words 'nostos', meaning 'return', and 'algos', meaning 'pain'. The men travel down the mountains and some believe that the idea of nostalgia came from the fact that these men suffered from the pains when they reached the plains where the air was less thin. These pains were separated from their homes and the ones they loved, leading to the concept of nostalgia as a psychological condition.

The second stanza describes the way this idea of nostalgia as a form of emotion is embedded in the popular consciousness, leading some to fear leaving their homes and suffer the same fate as those travellers. In the third stanza, the poet depicts the men's attempts to reconnect to the places they have been missing, only to realise that they cannot turn back time.

Stanza one



Questions

1. **The poem begins by portraying the departure of the mercenaries as a life-threatening and harmful to their well-being.**
 - (a) How is **caesura** used to highlight these ideas?
 - (b) What is the effect of the **metaphor** and **parallel phrasing** in the first line?
2. **The mercenaries are shown as intent in their search for material wealth, but they have lost their familiar land.**
 - (a) Which **adjectives** are used to portray this wealth as an unsatisfying loss?
 - (b) Which **verb** is used to depict their desperation to cling on to their wealth?
3. **The men are presented as dissatisfied with their new surroundings.**

How are **repetition** and **references to the senses** used to reinforce this?
4. **Nostalgia here is described largely as a physical condition.**
 - (a) Find examples from the **semantic field of death and disease** to show how the poem links nostalgia to physical suffering.
 - (b) Which words does she use, in contrast, to reveal the emotional condition of the men?

Stanza two

The second stanza begins with the **simple declarative sentence** 'It was given a name'. The theme of the power of language, a common concern in Duffy's collection *Mean Time*, is highlighted here. As she notes, it is so powerful that it induces fear in those who, unlike the travellers, have not embarked on the same adventures, as they experience the same feelings of loss for their familiar surroundings.



Questions

5. Consider how the sadness of nostalgia is portrayed by Duffy through the use of:
 - oxymoron
 - symbolic references to light
 - references to particular places or memories
 - sibilance
 - use of particular verbs

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Stanza three

The beginning of this stanza mirrors the first line of stanza two, starting again with ('But the word was out') and using words from **the semantic field of language** ('with the word', 'language', 'words') and **hyperbole** ('some would never / fall in love had they not heard of love') to accentuate the power of language in shaping our understanding of our emotional experiences. She suggests that if we had invented, people had a language to describe the feelings of longing for the past that they stayed in the same place.



Questions

6. The poet introduces two characters in this stanza – the school teacher and the soldier. How are they different from the mercenaries of the first stanza? What message does the poet convey about the soldier, who suffers in the same way because of their feelings of nostalgia?
7. The stanza also describes one of the mercenaries returning back to his home after a long absence. Why is it significant that he returns in spring?
8. Carol Ann Duffy uses **internal rhyme** here ('with his life / in a sack of flour') to draw attention to the soldier's story.
9. At the end of the poem, Duffy suggests that even if a person returns home, they will experience mixed feelings, as although they can see their families, the passing of time and its effects on us cannot be reversed. What **adjective** does Duffy repeat in this stanza in order to convey the soldier's feelings? What does the mercenary see when they return home? How does this compare to the soldier's experience?
10. What do you think the 'same bell / chiming the hour on the clock' might represent?
11. How is the **antithesis** used to convey the tension between the mercenary's desire to return to familiar places and the fact that he has been separated from them?

Comparison with other poems

- This poem is different from Carol Ann Duffy poems such as 'The Captain...' as it is written from a first-person perspective. What is the effect of the use of **the third-person** in this poem?
- **Memory** is a significant theme in this poem, similarly to 'Litany' and 'The Captain'. How do the memories and the characters' attitudes to them in each of the texts?
- **Language** is portrayed as important in this poem as it helps shape our understanding of the world and our emotional experiences. How is the power of language also explored in 'Litany'?

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'Stafford Afternoons'



In pairs:

How old were you when you were first allowed to go out on your own without being scared or excited? People often say that children now have less freedom than previous generations. Do you think this is true? Why might this be?

Stanza one

The title suggests a memory of a specific place from the persona's childhood. The poem is set in a place of rest, a period when the child would have returned from school and had free time without much supervision.



Questions

1. How does the beginning of the poem convey a memory of a specific place? How does it seem like?
2. How does the poet portray the child's isolation? Do you think the isolation promises freedom, or both?

Stanzas two and three

The poetic persona is a child who ventures out of her familiar environment. She explores the world around her and experiences it at first hand. She enjoys immersing herself in the natural world, riding a horse and venturing alone in the woods. Nature at first seems to be welcoming her, but the human world, represented by the 'strange boy', appears hostile in contrast. The poem portrays the world as aggressive and threatening, foreshadowing the meeting with the boy at the end of the poem.



Questions

3. How is the child's desire to connect and communicate with the world conveyed in stanzas two and three?
4. How do the descriptions of the motorway and the boy she encounters contrast with the natural world as hostile?
5. How is the relationship between the girl and the natural world portrayed through her actions towards the horse and the way she feels when she first enters the woods?
6. How does the poet create a sense of the girl as an explorer in these stanzas? How does she portray her desire to escape from her suburban environment?

Stanzas four, five and six

At first the girl finds the natural world, as symbolised by the horse and the woods, to be enchanting and soothing. However, as she goes deeper into the unfamiliar forest, the non-human world also seems threatening. At this point, the mood of the poem changes as the girl's feelings develop from a sense of excitement at the adventure she is experiencing to an atmosphere of danger and foreboding.



Questions

7. Find examples of how the following devices are used in stanza four to create a sense of danger and sinister:
 - contrast between short and long sentences
 - personification
 - adjective choices
 - synaesthesia

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In the woods, she encounters a man who exposes himself to her. Her fear and discovery of the adult world where she lives, comprehending that her exploration of the world is a step into the adult world which she does not understand. The event signals the beginning of her becoming aware of a sinister, predatory form of male sexuality. At the end of the poem, she returns to her own safe world, but she feels altered and separate from the other children after this experience.

8. How does Duffy present the effect of seeing the man in the woods on the girl's attitude to the outside world seem to change as a result?
9. How are the children described in the poem? How is the girl's world changed by her experience? How is this presented through the use of **metaphor**?



Comparisons to other poems

- How does the portrayal of childhood compare to that in other poems?
- How does this memory compare to the ones described in other poems?
- How are ideas of time and change explored here and in other poems?



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'Before You Were Mine'



Discussion in groups

- How much do you know about your parents' youth? Were they particularly different now?
- How do you feel you have changed your parents' lives? Can you list ways you have created an impact?
- Look at the title. What does it tell us about the way Duffy sees the mother and the mother?

Stanza one

The poet looks at a photograph of her mother taken two years before she was born. She appears happy and relaxed with two of her friends. The verbs 'laugh' and 'shriek' convey the mother as carefree and fun-loving in her youth. The relationship between her and her friends seems close, supportive and they seem to be having fun, emphasised by the noun 'pals'. Her mother appears to be an attractive and well-dressed figure who models her on Marilyn Monroe, a movie star and 'blonde bombshell' of the 1950s. The line 'Your dress blows round your legs, Marilyn.' portrays the poet as likening the photograph to a famous scene from the Marilyn Monroe film *The Seven Year Itch*, where Marilyn stands on a fire escape and experience the breeze. The reference to this iconic film gives her young mother an identity, transforming her in the eyes of her daughter, who starts to see her as a woman rather than just a mother.



Questions

1. How do the **verbs** in the poem portray the mother's early life and her friends?
2. What is the effect of the **proper nouns** used in stanza one?

Stanza two

Like the first stanza, the poem begins with a statement about how she is not a part of her mother's life. This is conveyed through the simple sentence 'I'm not here yet'. In her youth, her mother had friends and a life, but the possibility of love, suggested by the metaphor of 'a love that was a little like the love that I had', experienced through her mother's romantic relationships which she had to hide from her own mother.



Questions

3. How does Duffy convey the sense of optimism and future possibilities?
4. What is the effect of Duffy's use of **pronouns** in this stanza ('I'm', 'me')?
5. Why do you think that Duffy uses **colloquial language** such as 'pals'?
6. Pick two **simple sentences** from this stanza and comment on them.

Stanza three

In this stanza, there is a change as Duffy reflects on the way the presence of the mother has changed. The noun phrase 'possessive yell' brings firmly into focus the way her mother's life has changed. She remembers playing with her mother and suggests that it is only now, looking back at the photograph, that she begins to understand her mother's thrilling youth. The nouns 'relics' and 'ghost' point to the glamour of her mother's life. The poet imagines the mother walking at her mother's age in these shoes after meeting her.



Questions

7. Pick out two **rhetorical questions** used in the poem and discuss how they are used.
8. What do you think that the 'loud, possessive yell' refers to and what is the impact of the child on the woman's life?
9. What are the connotations of the **adjectives** 'high heeled' and 'red' in the mother's shoes, and what do the shoes tell us about the woman? Why does the poet use the **concrete noun** 'relic' to describe her mother's shoes?
10. Consider how the process of memory is presented in the poem. Comment on 'clatters toward me over George Square' and the **simile** 'till I see you'.

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Stanza four

There is a change in focus again, this time to the poet's early childhood memories. She remembers how her mother's fun-loving, unconventional spirit ('Cha! Cha! Cha!') as she has to adapt herself to a more traditional lifestyle now that she has a family with the glamorous figure of the young woman that her mother used to be, seeing her as a person to the parent that she knows, suggested by the syndetic listing 'sparkle and were mine'.



Questions

11. How is the girl's relationship with her mother presented in the stanza?
12. Find poetic devices and literary techniques which convey the girl's personality and vitality.



Comparisons to other poems

Find quotations from each poem to support the following statements. Compare literary/linguistic devices used in your chosen quotations.

While 'The Captain...' revisits his pleasant memories of childhood, the persona mother's past and imagines the happy times she must have had.

Quotation from 'The Captain...':

Quotation from 'Before You Were Mine':

While the mother is portrayed as a strict disciplinarian in 'Litany', the mother in 'Before You Were Mine' is portrayed as a joyous, carefree presence.

Quotation from 'Litany':

Quotation from 'Before You Were Mine':

While in 'Litany' the child wants to rebel against her mother's values, in 'Before You Were Mine' the child wants to emulate her mother.

Quotation from 'Litany':

Quotation from 'Before You Were Mine':



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'The Cliché Kid'



Definition of cliché

A cliché is an expression or idea, which has become overused to the point of effect, even to the point of being superficial or annoying.

Try to complete the clichés below:

- 'Your eyes are like s - - - -'.
- 'I had the time of m - - - -'.
- 'He was moving at the speed of l - - - -'.
- 'He was as brave as a l - - - -'.

Can you think of any other clichés? Why do you think that people use clichés?

Summary and Analysis

The poem deals with the process of memory and the recalling of traumatic events. It is light-hearted, in contrast to the emotionally distressing memories described using the persona of a male psychoanalysis patient addressing his doctor. It explores the way by which people talk about forgotten events, often from childhood, in order to make sense of them. The persona of the poem appears to struggle to come to terms with his feelings, which are in conflict with society's ideal of masculinity.

Masculinity itself is presented as an idea based on clichés ('butch in my boyhood'), and, therefore, ridiculed and satirised in the poem.

Stanzas one and two

The first two stanzas present the persona as suffering as a result of his childhood experiences with gender roles by describing the father's 'ballgown' and 'French scent'. This is a cliché normally reserved for the **mother**. Similarly, in stanza two, the mother's 'masculine' is described. The poem also hints that the persona might be suffering from post-traumatic stress as it describes his memory of the gun 'Big Bertha' 'pissing out' but



Questions

1. Which lines portray the suffering experienced as a result of childhood?
2. What is the effect of emphasising the verb 'forget' through enjambment?
3. What is the effect of the listing and ellipsis?
4. How are gender stereotypes subverted in these stanzas?
5. A typically 'macho' idiolect is created for the poetic persona through examples of these.

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Stanzas three and four

The persona recalls memories of feeling lonely during his childhood. He describes when he was friendless and unpopular. The use of colloquial, Americanised idiosyncratic language that the persona uses to describe his feelings is not his but it is learnt from their sensationalised portrayal of psychoanalysis. The child is portrayed as vulnerable, mocked by others for his mental illness. In order to compensate for his emotional vulnerability, he learns to behave in an exaggeratedly masculine way. The persona seems to be suggesting that his 'macho bars' is merely a performance, which is itself constituted of obvious clichés. The description of 'macho bars' could also be seen as a clichéd, stereotypical description of homosexual



Questions

6. Find words in stanzas three and four:

- words that convey the distress and loneliness of the persona
- an example of hyperbole which reflects his isolation as a child
- minor sentences
- alliteration
- colloquial language

Stanza five

The persona wants the doctor to help him take away the pain of these memories. In this stanza he also recalls happy memories of his first love, possibly for another young man ('the cheeks'). The joy of those moments contrasts with the persona's feelings of isolation. The memory of 'the day that I had to leave...' could imply that the persona was ostracised from his community or family, possibly because of these homosexual feelings.



Questions

7. Find and comment closely on:

- the use of imagery
- the use of anaphora to contrast present desolation with past joy

Stanza six

The last stanza deals with the persona's fear of mortality. Perhaps the message he finds difficult to express that again we resort to using clichés. Ironically for a poem where the persona is so painful, the sadness that the persona experiences at the thought of death derives from the knowledge that his memories will be forgotten ('the smell of the baby's head').



Questions

8. What is the effect of the repetition in this stanza?
9. Find words related to the sense of smell in the poem. Why do you think they are used?
10. Duffy takes two clichéd images – the 'new-mown grass' and 'the fresh bread'. Why does he invert them ('the fresh baked grass and the new mown bread')? Why is this significant?

Comparisons to other poems

- How are the persona's memories presented in other poems?
- How does Duffy present the power or limitations in language in 'Litany' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'?
- How does Duffy present feelings of isolation in other poems?

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'Beachcomber'



This poem is written from the point of view of an adult revisiting a childhood memory. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between the voice of the poem and the person reading it. By using the pronoun 'you' repeatedly in the poem to address this adult character, the reader too, suggesting that everyone tries to go back in time and relive memories. To what extent the memory is very vivid for the adult as she can recall every detail of the day that she heard on that day.



Questions

1. Why do you think the poem is written in the present tense?
2. Why do you think the poet refers to her younger self in third person?
3. What is the purpose of the questions from the poetic voice? Who do they address? ('How old are you now?'; 'You remember that cardigan, yes?')

The poet wants to access not merely the memory of what she saw or what happened, but also to experience it again and relive that moment, almost turn back time.

4. Find two examples from the poem that illustrate this and comment on the poet's words.



Duffy describes how for the person recalling the childhood memory, the child is 'in a photograph'. This is a photographic technique commonly used in the early days of photography – there were no photographs, from long ago.

5. What does this image communicate about the nature of this childhood memory recalled by the adult?

The poet also feels that it is important to establish contact between the adult and the child. She hopes that she may learn or understand her life better if she revisits the past.



Questions

6. The poet uses the **simple sentence** 'This is about something' to reflect on the meaning from this past experience. What does the **indefinite pronoun** 'something' make it easy for the reader to interpret the significance of memories?
7. Find also a **metaphor** from this stanza that conveys the effort to remember and make sense of memories.
8. What is the symbolic significance of the line: 'The girl suddenly'?



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However, in the final stanza the poet acknowledges the limits of the process of memory. Even though these memories may seem to return to the past and relive the same experience. The passage of time has also altered the physical and emotional distance from her younger self are insurmountable – it is



Questions

9. **Volta** is the point where the argument in a poem changes. It is often marked by words such as *But*, *Yet*, or *And yet*. Find the volta in this poem and explain its effect.
10. Find an example of a particularly **short line** and a particularly long line in the poem. Comment on their effect.
11. What is the effect of the **imperative** 'Open your eyes'? Find other imperatives in the poem and comment on why you think they are used.
12. How does Duffy present the effect of time and the difference between the past and the present?

Comparisons to other poems

Compare this poem with others from the collection in terms of the themes below. Analyse them closely:

- childhood
- memories
- time



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'Small Female Skull'

Summary

The adult imagines holding her own skull or the skull of her younger self

Three interpretations of the skull:

The skull = a reminder of her mortality

The image of holding the skull is well known in art and literature since the Renaissance. This is known as a *memento mori*. Translating as 'remember that you have to die', this term refers to the philosophical idea that everything in life is temporary and that death is inevitable for everyone. The image Duffy creates of the woman holding a skull in her hand is a reference to the famous scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where Prince Hamlet finds the skull of the court jester Yorrick in a newly dug grave and reflects on how the passage of time has changed him and begins to come to terms with death. The image is symbolic of humankind and the prince reflects on how the passage of time has changed him and begins to come to terms with death.

The image of the woman sitting on the lavatory with her head in her hands also serves as a reference to another famous image – Rodin's sculpture of *The Thinker*. By making references to the poses of contemplation, Carol Ann Duffy could also be incorporating a feminist message. In literature and art, philosophical contemplation is more often associated with the male character. In this poem, the woman is simultaneously the subject (the thinker) and the object of contemplation.



Questions

- The description of the skull portrays it as inert and inanimate, a symbol to a 'swimming cap', Duffy makes it sound like merely an ordinary object. By looking at the skull, the persona reflects on her own inevitable mortality. This idea that life is temporary is powerfully conveyed through the lines 'It cannot cry, holds my breath only as long as I exhale' and 'I rinse it under the tap, watch the dust run away, like sand from a swimming cap'.**
 - Analyse the images used to portray the skull as an inert, lifeless object.
 - 'It cannot cry, holds my breath only as long as I exhale'
 - 'I rinse it under the tap, watch the dust run away, like sand from a swimming cap'
- The inanimate nature of the skull is reinforced again as it is compared to a 'swimming cap'. The fragility of the skull is conveyed through the adjective 'papery' and likened to flimsy everyday objects. One of these objects, an 'ocarina' made from terracotta with holes for stops, which looks similar to a skull. Which object is compared to in the poem? Why do you think that Carol Ann Duffy uses these objects to compare the skull to?**
- What words and images does the poet use to portray the fragility of life and the nature of death?**
- The persona's affection towards the skull could be symbolic of her reconciliation with the fact that she will have to face the concrete reality of death. The description of her kissing it with 'my warm lips' and 'Love, I murmur to my skull, then louder, other grand words, shouting the hollow nouns in the white-tiled room.' shows her acceptance and protection towards the skull. However, the contemplation of death leads her to revisit and celebrate the emotions she has experienced during her life.**

Discuss how the persona's acceptance of death and celebration of life is shown in the poem below:

- 'my warm lips to its papery bone'
- 'Love, I murmur to my skull, then louder, other grand words, shouting the hollow nouns in the white-tiled room.'

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The skull = her younger self

In the poem, the persona holding the skull of her former self could symbolise the so much that it is almost as if the person that she used to be has died and a new perspective on life has replaced her.



Questions

5. The skull seems to possess powers of its own suggested through being seen as the ghost of her former self, bringing with it memories. This is supported by the concrete image of the 'scar', which symbolically relates to past experiences.



Initially, the following lines convey the powers of the skull and how it affects the persona:

- 'but with something else, as though it could levitate. Disturbing.'
- 'I see the scar where I fell for sheer love
down treacherous stairs, and read that shattering day like brass'
 - 'press my ear to its grin. A vanishing sigh.'

6. The persona seems to feel affection for the skull as the symbol of herself or the girl she used to be for the difficulties she had to endure.

Consider how this affection and pity towards her former self is portrayed:

- 'my warm lips to its papery bone'
- 'then dry it - first-born - gently'
- 'See, I hold her face in trembling, passionate hands'

The skull = a visual representation of her depression

The poet might be trying to create a visual image of her depression by presenting her as no longer responsive to the joy of life. The skull could be an attempt to describe her alienation. The description of the skull as fragile and childlike could be symbolic of the setting of the poem, a 'laboratory' where the persona is alone, isolated by her mind. Elsewhere, she says 'downs [where] they will think I lost my mind'.



Questions

7. Find words and images that portray the speaker as:
- distressed and vulnerable
 - isolated and unable to communicate with others
 - haunted by painful memories

Comparisons to other poems

Find quotations from other poems which deal with the following themes:

- memories of a younger self
- the passing of time
- melancholy
- isolation



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'First Love'

Match up the quotations from the poem on the left with the correct literary or linguistic term on the right.

'a dream'

'as close to my lips as lipstick'

'clench'

'unfocused'

'slow speed'

d

a

The poetic persona describes a dream of the person who was her first love. The dream brings her close to the person she used to love.



Questions: Lines 1–3

1. How is the closeness that the persona feels towards her former lover portrayed?
2. How is the sense of separation between 'now' and 'then' portrayed?

She enters the spell of that new magic and experiences strong, erotic feelings as if herself seems transformed into a magical place and she becomes more sensitive to her intense feelings for her lover.



Questions: Lines 3–5

3. Why is the **abstract noun** 'power' emphasised through **enjambment**?
4. Why is the **adjective** 'naked' used here?
5. What **metaphor** is used here and what is its effect?

Even though her memories of their life together seem unclear and dim at first due to time having passed since they were together, the persona wills herself to recall those memories.



Questions: Lines 6–8

6. How is the effort of summoning memories of the lover portrayed here?

Everything that she now sees becomes a reminder of that person, who is now with her in her imagination although she no longer knows what has happened to her and where he is.



Questions: Lines 9–10

7. How is the persona's obsession with her first love conveyed?

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The stars in the sky become reminders of the pain of her loss. The stars that we see in space, but because their light takes such a long time to reach us on earth, they could be seen as a metaphor for the way in which the memory of the loved one is haunt her despite the fact that the person is no longer there in her life.



Questions: Lines 11–12

8. What images and words are used to convey the pain of loss?

There is no longer any real connection between the persona and her beloved. The sentiment is from her own dream, a metaphor for the way her imagination has recreated the past. The poet sees herself as 'faithful' to her first love as she has kept her alive in her mind.



Questions: Lines 13–14

9. What is the effect of the **verb** 'stammers' here?
10. What **minor sentence** is used and why?

The memory brings joy as well as pain, as their 'reunion' is bittersweet because they are together in the real world.



Questions: Lines 15–16

11. What words and techniques are used to convey the fact that she can't let go of her imagination?
12. How is **antithesis** used to suggest the pain and joy that she experiences?

Comparisons to other poems

Consider how the poet portrays:

- the persona's love
- the intimacy between two lovers
- the effect of the passage of time
- memories

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'Never Go Back'



Discussion in pairs

- Have you ever moved away from a place where you used to live and then returned? What was it like seeing the same places and people again?
- Are there any friends that you have grown apart from as you got older? What was it like when you saw them now?
- In the future, do you think you would like to keep living in the place you're in now or would you like to settle down elsewhere? Why?

In the poem, the speaker returns to the place where she used to live and feels depressed by it. She encounters people she was once close to, but finds herself unable to connect with them in a meaningful way.



In pairs

Find examples of words and images related to **death and disease** in the poem. What effect does the effect of time on the place that the speaker returns to?

Stanzas one and two

The first stanza is set in the bar the speaker visits when returning to the place where she used to live. The poet suggests that everything stays the same and everyone is locked in their routines. The speaker attempts to interact with the people she was once close to, but the conversation is superficial and lacks meaning. They can only reminisce about the stories and memories they have in common, but these memories no longer seem real or meaningful to her. There is a sense of self-deception in these stanzas as the speaker tries to convince herself that they are still close friends, yet she feels emotionally distant. The person she used to be when she lived there is gone. She is resigned to the fact that she can no longer connect with the people from her past and is resolved to deaden her feelings to the place where she no longer fits in.



Questions

1. What does the **oxymoron** 'the living dead' suggest about the way the speaker interacts with her acquaintances?
2. What is the effect of the **personification** of the jukebox which 'reminds me of you'? Which keywords suggest a sense of **antithesis** 'there is nothing to say. You talk for hours'? Which keywords suggest a sense of enjambment and why?
3. What **metaphors** are used to describe the topics of conversation in the first stanza? What do they suggest about the way she connects with the people from her past?
4. What does the **abstract noun** 'ghost' suggest about the way the speaker interacts with the people in the bar?
5. Find a line where time is **personified** and analyse it.
6. How is **personification** and **pathetic fallacy** used in the second stanza to describe the place and the speaker's feelings towards it?
7. How is her friend depicted in the second stanza?
8. Why do you think the poet uses a series of **minor and simple sentences** in the second stanza? Identify them and comment on their effect.
9. In what way does the structure of the first and second stanzas mirror the use of repetition within them.

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Stanzas three and four

The speaker returns to the place where she was a 'bride' and experienced love. To her, as it seems destroyed and neglected, scarred by the painful memories of the judgment as a result of deserting the place and perhaps her previous relationship. Unwanted in the house, tormented by the anguish that she has experienced and there is seen by her as a necessary mistake, a stage in her life that she had to go through and develop into the person that she is now. She feels as if a part of her has died and is determined to escape these memories and leave behind the person she used to be.



Questions

10. Find examples of **personification** and comment on how the house is presented.
11. What metaphors and images does Duffy use to present the house as hostile?
12. How does Duffy portray the speaker's memories of the life she lived there?
13. What do the **verbs** 'shaking' and 'slamming' tell us about her attitude? Which other words or images can also be used to support your ideas?
14. Find three examples of **caesura** in these stanzas and comment on its effect.
15. Focus on three words emphasised by **enjambment** and comment on their effect.

Stanzas five and six



Questions

Find quotations from these stanzas to support the statements below. For each statement, find at least two literary, linguistic or poetic features:

16. The speaker leaves the place where she used to live, considering the past as dead.
17. She sees how the town has changed and considers that it has deteriorated.
18. The town is presented as grisly and grotesque, full of hostility towards her. She does not understand it.
19. She is desperate to escape it and feels herself exiled from a place where she once belonged.
20. The landscape is filled with sadness for her and as she leaves, the place already begins to feel unreal from her as she is finally disconnected.
21. She welcomes this detachment from familiar memories and returns to the place she created her home, a place where she feels comforted and welcomed.

Comparisons to other poems

Consider how the following are presented in other poems:

- the feeling of being stifled in a conventional, suburban environment
- the destructive effect of time on close relationships
- feelings of alienation

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'Valentine'



In pairs

In your pairs, think of two typical Valentine's Day gifts. Why do you think on this day? What do they tell us about the way that love is presented in



Debate – two groups

Group 1: You will now need to prepare a case to support the statement: 'Valentine's Day is a celebration of love that many argue has become a cliché.' You will need to prepare a case to support the statement: 'Valentine's Day is a celebration of love that many argue has become a cliché.'



Group 2: You will now need to prepare a case to support the statement: 'Valentine's Day is a celebration of love that many argue has become a cliché.' You will need to prepare a case to support the statement: 'Valentine's Day is a celebration of love that many argue has become a cliché.'



Questions on the poem

This is a love poem in which the poet wants to dispel all the clichés surrounding Valentine's Day. The poet suggests that the gifts exchanged by everyone on this day are the same. The poet is suggesting that the gifts given by lovers on this day present an image of love that is untruthful.

1. Give an example of **parallel phrasing** from the poem through which the poet conveys her feelings of romance.

The speaker wants to give her loved one a more unconventional gift. She considers the onion as an appropriate gift as its outer layers are like the layers of someone's character as we get to know them.

2. Find a **metaphor** and a **simile** in stanza two and analyse them.

The extended metaphor of the onion is continued as the onion is also a symbol of love. The poet suggests that the suffering that love brings is like the pain of an onion. The poet suggests that the suffering that love brings is like the pain of an onion.

3. Find images from the poem that portray the pain of love. Analyse the terminology.

Thirdly, the comparison between the onion and the emotion of love is made. The onion's pungent smell is difficult to get rid of, the love that the speaker feels is 'faithful' and 'possessive'.

4. What does the description of the onion's 'fierce kiss' imply about the offering?
5. Why do you think the **adjectives** 'possessive' and 'faithful' are on separate lines? How do these adjectives convey about the speaker's feelings?
6. What is the effect of the **repetition** in stanza 6?

The final stanza reiterates the suffering and feelings of entrapment. The poem becomes darker and more possessive as the onion, as a symbol of love, is forced onto the lover in order to bind them together forever. The love is portrayed as it is a pain and destruction.

7. What is the effect of the **imperative** 'Take it' at the beginning of the final stanza?
8. Analyse the **metaphor** 'its platinum rings shrink to a wedding ring'.
9. How is the destructive and painful side of love portrayed in this stanza?

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Comparisons to 'First Love'

Find quotations from the poems to support the following statements and analyse using linguistic terminology:

In both poems, the speaker feels closely bound to their loved one.

Quotations from 'Valentine'...

Quotations from 'First Love'...

The pain of love is portrayed in both poems.

Quotations from 'Valentine'...

Quotations from 'First Love'...

While in 'First Love' the speaker is now separated from their lover, in 'Valentine' the speaker wants to make the relationship last forever.

Quotations from 'Valentine'...

Quotations from 'First Love'...

Can you think of any more similarities or differences between these two poems?

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'Close'



In Groups

In groups, find quotations which support the following statements about the literary and linguistic terminology. Try to comment on the following devices:

- imperative sentences
- imagery of light and darkness
- metaphors
- simple sentences
- minor sentences
- words highlighted by enjambment
- parallel phrasing
- personification
- the motif of rooms and houses
- repetition
- the use of pronouns

Stanza one

The poem describes a relationship in which the couple struggle with conflicting emotions. Imagery of darkness conveys their despair and the abstract noun 'journey' might suggest that their relationship has come to an end. The personification of their 'childhoods', which watch them 'take their former innocence with their savage hostility'.

Stanza two

They feel trapped by their intense relationship, simultaneously feeling deeply tied to each other and wanting to break away from their connection. The lover is described as most like a hunter, trapped by the door, and the sense of mutual imprisonment is highlighted by the imperative at the end of the stanza: 'the door'.

Stanza three

Although the couple is physically intimate and seem to be attuned to each other's thoughts, they struggle to communicate successfully and make their needs understood by their partner. The metaphor of 'undress' and the direct address to the lover 'you have me like a drawing... signed' suggest that the physical closeness of the relationship still exists. On the other hand, the metaphor of 'homeless' as 'homeless' implies that she has lost the sense of security that the relationship once provided.

Stanza four

The speaker reflects on how a relationship which used to provide comfort and stability has become destructive to their mental states and well-being. The use of the verbs 'shake' and 'distress' suggests the distress felt by the persona while the pathetic fallacy through which the street is described as 'dark' suggests that they have lost the ability to communicate with each other.

Stanza five

She remembers the past that they shared together and reflects on the time they spent together, suggested by the personification 'time' and 'space'. The speaker seems to suggest that the secrets of the past might have contributed to the breakdown of the relationship, implied by the metaphor of 'crammed with secrets'.

However, there is also the implication that the past was a happier, more innocent time, contrasted with the bleakness and the tension of their relationship at this point. This is implied through the metaphor of 'years which stand outside' and look on pityingly at the way this relationship has broken down, while the 'ghosts' of the lovers imply that some of their original affection might still remain.

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'The Biographer'

Summary

As in 'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team', Duffy uses a biographer who is plagued by feelings of inadequacy. The biographer measures himself against the work he admires, but whose success and talent he could never hope to emulate.

Stanza one

The biographer is presented as attempting to get as close as possible to his subject. His presence is made real by his writing desk and touching the physical marks the man's presence is made real to him as he looks at his image on a daguerreotype (an early photographic process). Speaking aloud fragments from his work, an attempt to enter his mind and understand his perspective.



Questions

1. What does the **verb** 'caressing' suggest about the biographer's attitude towards his subject? How does this line think this line is longer than other lines in the stanza?
2. Why do you think the **verb** 'echo' is emphasised by being placed at the end of the line? How does it portray the relationship between the biographer and the writer he admires?
3. What words and images are used to portray how acutely the biographer feels the writer's presence in the room?
4. What do you think the poet suggests when she writes that the biographer 'tries to remember a quote from his idol's work'? What word class does this word belong to?

Stanza two

While the first stanza focuses on the biographer's subject, the writer, the focus of the second stanza is the biographer's description of himself. He is presented as an adoring fan who is motivated by his life-long admiration of him as much by financial incentives. The biographer, to enter the writer's world, to experience things as he had experienced them by living in his house and office, he comes to realise the gap between this talented, successful man and himself, in contrast to the writer he admires who would have considered him his inferior as he becomes aware of his insignificance.



Questions

5. How is the biographer's materialism (i.e. interest in money) conveyed? How does the poet depict the writer's superior material success?
6. How does the **caesura** after 'I came awake-' introduce a shift in the poem?
7. What **verbs** are used to convey the biographer's sense that he would like to be the writer he admires? Consider also the effect of **enjambment** in the poem, emphasising these feelings.
8. How are **metaphorical language** and other techniques used to portray the biographer's resentment and misery at his failure to measure up to the writer he admires?

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Stanza three

The biographer's feelings of inferiority seem to intensify in this stanza. Although he finds his true essence in his own work, he finds that he relies on other biographers who have written about the fictitious Emma Elizabeth Hibbert. Instead of finding his own way to describe his subject, he repeats Hibbert's words, as if he has nothing new to add. In an attempt to understand the writer, he walks in his footsteps through all the places that inspired him, yet he feels unwelcome in these settings, again accentuating the distance between him and the world that his subject inhabited.



Questions

9. What is the effect of the direct quotation from Emma Elizabeth Hibbert?
10. What do you think the biographer is referring to when describing 'the places he walked through the **syndetic list** 'leer and gape and plead at my feet'?
11. Find an example of **sibilance** and comment on the effect of the word.
12. Why do you think the **abstract noun** 'shadow' is **repeated** in this stanza?
13. What words and images are used to depict the speaker's feelings of inferiority?

Stanza four

In this stanza, the biographer explores the similarities and differences between himself and the writer. In many ways, the writer could be seen as the biographer's doppelganger – his double, and there are similarities between them, such as the fact that they both seem to take pride in their work. The biographer intimates that the writer would have 'approved' of his affair with a 'famous woman'. However, the speaker suggests that no matter how hard he tries to get close to him, he will always lack his greatness and his literary talent.



Questions

14. Identify the **minor sentence** in this stanza and comment on the ideas it conveys (focus particularly on the descriptions of the writer and of the biographer).
15. How is the biographer's obsession with his subject presented?
16. How does the speaker's desire to be seen as powerful and masculine desire to undermine this and convey him as a weak failure instead?
17. What images are used to present the biographer and writer as doubles? Why are these chosen to portray the relationship between them in this way?

Similarities between 'The Biographer' and 'The Captain...'

Find quotations from both poems and analyse them, commenting on the way in which they convey the following:

- feelings of failure
- desire to be seen as powerful and successful
- the portrayal of masculinity
- disappointment in romantic relationships
- anything else?

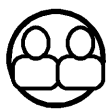
Differences

- 'The Captain...' – the speaker's feelings of frustration and melancholy as his previous romantic relationship has ended, contrasting with the youthful success of the biographer.
- 'The Biographer' – his feelings of failure are amplified as he compares himself to the writer he admires.
- anything else?

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'Mean Time'



In pairs

Read the poem and consider what mood and atmosphere is created. Pick out evidence to support your ideas.



Questions on the poem

In this poem, the speaker expresses her regrets about the end of a relationship, setting the action on a winter's day when the clocks change and the evenings are longer.

1. What do you think is meant by the fact that the speaker feels that the relationship is 'mean time'? What literary technique is used here?

The speaker appears to be disorientated and confused because of the way time is symbolically portrayed by her walking through 'the wrong part of town' which is impossible to save, and thinking about her lover and the possibilities of a future without great pain.

2. Find and analyse words and images which portray the idea that the relationship is 'mean time'.
3. Consider how **pathetic fallacy** and particular word choices are used to create a sense of time and feelings.

The speaker feels sadness and frustration at the possibility that if they had said various hurtful things to each other on this day, the relationship would have ended. She wishes that she could turn back time and undo all the harm they have done to each other.

4. What is the effect of beginning stanza three with the **conjunction** 'if'?
5. What does the image of the 'dark' in stanza three suggest about the speaker's feelings?
6. Identify the **personification** in stanza three and comment on the effect.
7. Who does the **pronoun** 'you' refer to here and why is it used?

In stanza four, the speaker begins to move the focus away from the relationship and towards mortality. There is the suggestion that in the same way as everything passes the test of time, every joy or happiness will eventually pass. She uses the image of winter as symbolic of the way life becomes shorter with every passing year.

8. What is the effect of the **conjunction** 'but' at the beginning of stanza four?
9. Why do you think the poet uses the **pronoun** 'we' in this stanza?
10. What does the 'light' symbolise in this stanza? Why do you think that the poet uses it?
11. Find an example of **antithesis** in the stanza and comment on the effect.

The poet uses irregular line length in the poem, with most of the lines being ten syllables long.

12. Why do you think this might be? Pick out two lines which are particularly effective and comment on the ideas conveyed in them.

Enjambment is used to highlight important words at the beginning or end of a line.

13. Pick out three lines in the poem where words are emphasised by enjambment. Comment on the effect.

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Comparisons to 'Close'

Find quotations from the poems which support the comparative sentences below.

In both poems, the speaker describes a relationship that has deteriorated over time.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

Both poems portray the breakdown of communication between a couple.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

The speaker in each poem is portrayed as isolated and lonely.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

Imagery of darkness is used in both poems to portray the despair felt by the speaker.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

In both poems, the speaker addresses the lover directly, creating a confession.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

While in 'Close' the poet presents a relationship where there is still intimacy, in 'Mean Time' she describes a relationship which is completely broken down.

Quotations from 'Mean Time'...

Quotations from 'Close'...

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Exam Preparation

How to revise

Step 1:

Reread the poems and make mind maps on each one about them about the way

- time
- events
- places
- people and relationships

Use your answers to the questions in this booklet to find the best quotation and linguistic terminology.

Step 2:

Fill in the comparative table in the appendix, noting the similarities and differences, particularly in relation to the themes above.

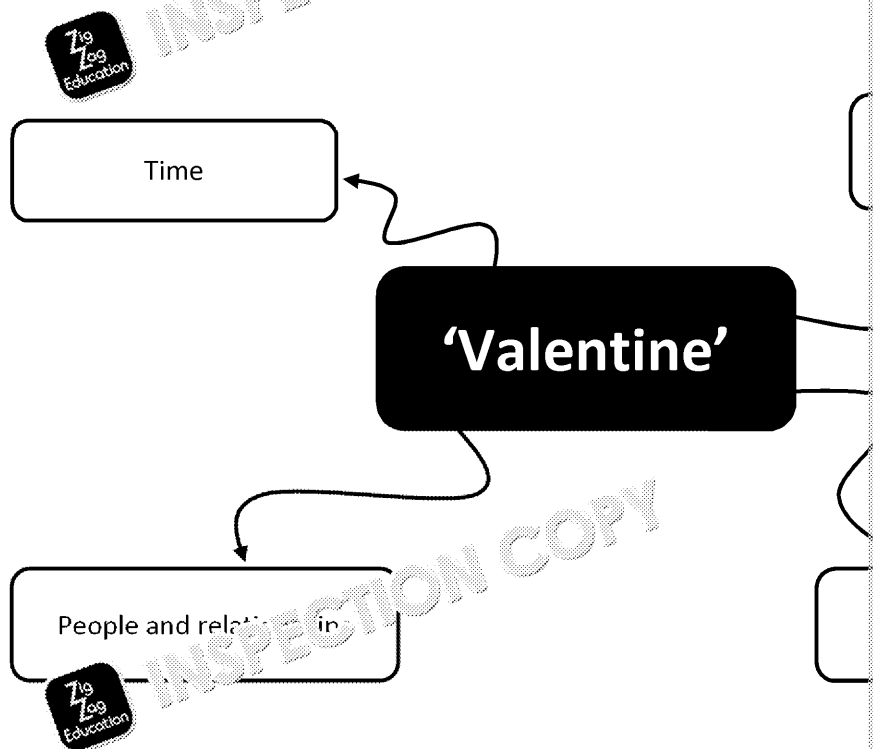
Step 3:

Plan and write answers to the example essay questions in this booklet.

Step 4:

Rewrite the mind maps on the poems without the notes, with just the blank

Example of mind map



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AS Level

AS Level questions

1. Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays relationships in 'Close' and 'Valentines'.
2. Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays time in 'No Time' and 'The Captain'.
3. Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays places in 'Never Go Back' and 'No One'.
4. Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays ideas about language in 'Litany' and 'The Biographer'.
5. Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays childhood in 'Stafford Afternoons' and 'The Biographer'.
6. Compare and contrast how Duffy presents memories in 'The Cliché Kid' and 'The Biographer'.

Potential essay structure – AS Level

Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays the characters of the speakers in 'The Captain' and 'The Biographer'.

Suggested essay plan:

Brief introduction

Outline main similarities and differences between the speakers of the two poems about the POETIC VOICE in each poem.

Comparison point 1 (a similarity or contrast):

For example, in both poems the speakers have a desire to be seen as powerful.

'The Captain...' quotations and analysis (2–4):

'The Biographer' quotations and analysis (2–4):

Comparison point 2 (a similarity or contrast):

'The Captain...' quotations and analysis (2–4):

'The Biographer' quotations and analysis (2–4):

Comparison point 3 (OPTIONAL)

'The Captain...' quotations and analysis (2–4):

'The Biographer' quotations and analysis (2–4):

Conclusion – summarise the main ideas about the speakers in each poem; perhaps compare the personas in these poems and how they differ from other speakers in the collection.

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Mark scheme for AS Level

	AO1: Use of literary and linguistic terminology as part of fluent, coherent analysis of the poems	AO2: Analysis of the meaning of the poems and their key themes
Level 5 13–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are sustained, developed in detail and expressed in a sophisticated way A wide range of literary and linguistic terminology is applied accurately Excellent level of written expression and vocabulary Relevant language levels and patterns are evaluated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an excellent understanding of the question by approaching it from all angles and interpreting it subtly Many well-chosen quotations used to support ideas Perceptive analysis of the poetic voice and the poet's other techniques and their effects
Level 4 10–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are expressed coherently and are developed Relevant use of literary and linguistic terminology Some exploration of the patterns of imagery in the poems Language levels and some patterns are explored Purposeful and clear written expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good and secure analysis of the poems Relevant focus on the question Clear and sound interpretation of the poems Points supported by appropriate quotations Poetic voice and other techniques and their effects explored
Level 3 7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are presented in a clear and well-organised way Terminology is applied fairly accurately Some features of language levels are explained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some analysis with a strong forward focus on the question Some valid interpretations Some relevant quotations used Some explanation/discussion of poetic voice and other techniques and their effects
Level 2 4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organisation of ideas Identifies some literary or linguistic features, but does not always use these accurately or precisely Some features of language levels are identified but not developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some analytical points mixed with other more generalised, descriptive ones Some awareness of the writer's techniques but little comment on effects Some correct interpretations
Level 1 1–3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are not organised very well Limited terminology Limited written expression Some features of language levels may be described with limited awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short and undeveloped essay Limited use of terminology or attention to the writer's techniques Limited interpretation

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Exemplar AS essay

Compare and contrast how Duffy portrays places in 'Never Go Back' and 'Nostalgia'

'Never Go Back' uses direct address to the reader through the second person pronoun 'you' to convey what it is like for everyone when they return to a place they have become estranged from in a different form, referring to the characters of the poem in the third person. The poem is set in the distant past. However, the effect here is to make the feelings of longing and nostalgia more universalised using a more particular form.

Both poems feature characters which return to the places that they once called home. In 'Nostalgia' the persona feels that she 'owes' the place she once lived in something, but that this is not the 'currency' she has. The use of the semantic field of money and debt implies that the persona has an obligation to the place where she was once at home, yet the adjective 'unpayable' suggests she feels able to connect with this place in the way that she feels she ought to. This is how the place in a meaningful way can be seen in the way her conversation with the men constitutes 'agreed motifs, anecdotes shuffled from a well-thumbed pack, snaps and stories' listing conveys the fragmented nature of the conversation and the persona's desire for the conversation flowing without awkwardness. However, the abstract nouns 'motifs' and 'anecdotes' suggest the poet wishes to revisit memories which bind her and her companions together. The stories become a reminder of how little their paths have crossed since then.

While in 'Never Go Back' the persona's return to her home is complicated by feelings of alienation, in 'Nostalgia', the longing to return is much more earnestly felt. While 'Never Go Back' uses images of death and disease to convey the persona's feelings of despair at returning home, 'Nostalgia' the same imagery is used to convey the persona's desire to thrive away from the place of birth. Words from the semantic field of disease such as 'pirate', 'murder', 'killing' suggest the men feel weakened by this alienation. The phrase 'pain in the heart' implies that with time, they begin to enjoy wallowing in the memories they have left behind.

While in 'Never Go Back' the persona feels revulsion towards the old places where she lived, in 'Nostalgia' it is the new places that seem disappointing and alien. Duffy uses parallelism to convey the mercenaries' inability to accept the differences between the new place and the familiar place they have left behind: 'the wrong sounds, the wrong smells, the wrong light'. The adjective 'wrong' highlights their complete rejection of this new place, while through the abstract nouns 'sounds', 'smells', 'light' convey how deep the bonds of memory can also exist on a physical, subconscious level. While in 'Nostalgia', the memories of the places of the past are portrayed as 'romantic, pastoral in the music of home', in 'Never Go Back' the persona's memories of the various stanzas of the poem are presented as doomed and ominous, as enjambment is used to highlight metaphors which have a dark, ominous tone. The taxi driver who 'looks like death'. Duffy presents the persona who is perhaps seen as a deserter, as the verbs 'accusing' and 'stare' suggest the speaker and her past in this place.

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Although 'Nostalgia' appears to have a very different attitude to the place than 'The same street...', at the end of the poem it is suggested that returning home is difficult for everyone. The travellers' recognition of 'the same street... The same bell' which still seem familiar is a perception of the fact that for them, psychologically, 'everything changed' as they have had different experiences.

Highlight using different colours the way this essay addresses particular assessment objectives that will be marked on in the exam:

- sentences which compare the two poems, including discourse markers such as 'contrast', 'similarly', 'in contrast' (AO3)
- equal time spent discussing each of the two poems (AO3)
- literary terminology (metaphors, parallel phrasing, similes, imagery) (AO1/AO2)
- linguistic terminology (verbs, nouns, etc.; sentence types; semantic field) (AO1/AO2)
- poetic form and structure (stanzas, poetic persona, enjambment, line length) (AO1/AO2)
- use of quotations from the poems and detailed analysis (AO2)

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A Level

A Level questions – Poetic Voices

1. In 'Valentine' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas about the poet.
2. In 'Nostalgia' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas about time.
3. In 'Litany' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas about language.
4. In 'Beat the Beauty' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas about the poet.
5. In 'The Cliché Kid' and one other poem of your choice, examine how memory.

Possible essay structure

In 'Small Female Skull' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas about time.

Suggested essay structure

Introduction:

Explain in what ways 'Small Female Skull' and the other poem of your choice don't need to compare. Try to mention something about the POETIC VOICE in

'Small Female Skull'

First point about the presentation of time:

For example, in this poem, the speaker contemplates the passage of time and the Quotations and analysis (2–4):

Second point about the presentation of time:

Quotations and analysis (2–4):

'Never Go Back' (you don't need to compare)

First point about the presentation of time:

For example, in this poem, Duffy explores how time changes so that it is difficult to find places which were familiar to us in the past.

Quotations and analysis (2–4):

Second point about the presentation of time:

Quotations and analysis (2–4):

Conclusion: Summarise the way time affects the speakers of the poems, as well as how they knew.

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Mark scheme for A Level

	AO1: Use of literary and linguistic terminology as part of fluent, coherent analysis of the poems	AO2: Analysis and interpretation
Level 5 13–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are developed in detail and expressed in a sophisticated way A wide range of literary and linguistic terminology is applied accurately Excellent level of written expression and vocabulary Some features of language levels and patterns are evaluated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an excellent understanding of the question by making a clear and coherent argument and interpretation Many well-chosen quotations support ideas Perceptive analysis of the poet's effects
Level 4 10–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are expressed coherently and are developed Relevant use of literary and linguistic terminology Some exploration of the patterns of imagery in the poems Language levels and some patterns are explored Purposeful and clear written expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good and sensible analysis Relevant for the question Clear and sophisticated argument Points supported by quotations Poetic voice and their effects
Level 3 7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are presented in a clear and well-organised way Terminology is applied fairly accurately Some features of language levels are explained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some analysis Straightforward argument Some valid points Some relevant quotations Some explanation of voice and of effects
Level 2 4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organised ideas Some use of literary or linguistic features, but does not always use these accurately or precisely Some features of language levels are identified but not developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some analysis More general points Some awareness of the poet's voice but little coherent argument Some correct quotations
Level 1 1–3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas are not organised very well Limited terminology Limited written expression Some features of language levels may be described with limited awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short and unconvincing argument Limited use of literary or linguistic terminology Limited understanding of the writer's voice Limited interpretation

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Example A Level essay

In 'Small Female Skull' and one other poem of your choice, examine how ideas are explored by the poet.

'Small Female Skull' and 'Mean Time' are both lyric poems in which Duffy uses her feelings about mortality and the effect of the passage of time on people and places.

In 'Small Female Skull', the speaker contemplates the passage of time and the symbolic image of a woman holding her dead skull – an image which echoes death in Shakespeare's play – Duffy creates a contrast between herself as a living body which will in the end become. This juxtaposition of the animate and the inanimate is reinforced by the use of antithesis as the persona describes putting her 'warm lips to its paper' as symbolic of her acceptance of death as she reconciles herself to her future. The poem suggests the brittle fragility of her body after death, destroyed by time, reinforced by the use of 'sand' and 'dust', which are again used in the poem as reminders that everything is ultimately be eroded.

The speaker of the poem greets the passage of time with a mixture of emotions. 'disturbing', 'alarmed' and 'appalled' as well as the dynamic verb 'weep' imply that she contemplates her mortality. The minor sentence 'A vanishing sigh' perhaps hints at the loss of everything that life has to offer. However, the verb 'weep' is contrasted in the same line, and the description of the situation as a 'fate' could suggest that this is a fate one has no chance to avoid. This is reinforced by the metaphor of the skull as a 'friend', suggesting that the speaker finds a release from the suffering of life.

In 'Mean Time', Duffy also explores the idea of the passage of time and contentment begins and ends with references to the way the clocks change at certain times, suggesting a feeling that an hour of our lives has been lost. Duffy personifies the clocks as symbols, claiming that they 'stole light from my life'. The use of the verb 'stole' implies that the passing of time and brevity of life is an injustice, and the use of the abstract noun 'light' suggests sadness for all the promise and beauty of life which will soon be lost. This idea is repeated in the poem, where the image of 'light' is repeated again, emphasised by being placed at the end of the sentence, mirroring the finality of death.

In this poem, the persona also expresses frustrations regarding mistakes which have led to the breakdown of her relationship. She wishes she could turn back time but realises that this is impossible. The use of the conditional 'if' at the beginning introduces the brief hope that a god-like time might have saved their relationship that day in which all the hurtful things they had said to each other might not have happened. The imagery of darkness in the poem, such as 'darkening sky' and 'endless night' conveys a sense of already meted out fate. The despair she feels at the fact that she is not a happy person is conveyed through the regret she feels at the loss of this relationship is conveyed through enjambment, suggesting that the end of the relationship felt like

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In conclusion, Duffy appears to be more reconciled to the inevitability of the past in 'Small Female Skull'. While in 'Mean Time' time seems to have irreparably damaged the lover, at the end of 'Small Female Skull' the speaker still tries to live the remainder of her life holding on to 'love' for as long as she can with 'trembling, passionate hands'.

Highlight using different colours the way this essay addresses the particular assessment objectives that will be marked on in the exam:

- literary terminology (metaphors, personification, similes, imagery) (AO1/AO2)
- linguistic terminology (verb forms, etc.; sentence types; semantic field) (AO1/AO2)
- poetic form and structure (stanzas, poetic persona, enjambment, line length) (AO1/AO2)
- use of evidence from the poems and detailed analysis (AO2)



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Further Reading

- *Selected Poems of Carol Ann Duffy: York Notes Advanced* Paperback – 23 Jul 2014
- *'Choosing Tough Words': The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy* Paperback – 1 Apr 2014 by Michelis (Editor), Antony Rowland (Editor)
- *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century British and Irish Women* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) Paperback – 17 Mar 2012 by Jane Dowson (Editor)
- *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves: Encountering Feminist Theology and Contemporary Literature* Paperback – 27 Mar 2014 by Anna Fisk (Author)
- *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry* (Concise Companions to Literature and Culture) Paperback – 31 Jan 2014 by Nigel Alderman (Editor), C D Blanton (Editor)



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Answers

'The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team'

Stanza one

1. Youthful, cheerful
2. 'Fizzing'; 'gargling' – sense of excitement and energy
3. 'Satchel'; 'convent girls'
4. Direct address to the reader through the imperative 'Hang on' – gives a sense that he wants to share it
5. 'my lips numb as a two-banana sandwich' – the personification of the satchel symbolically represents school
6. 'The clever satchel' – the personification of the satchel symbolically represents school

Stanza two

7.
 - **a minor sentence:** 'No snags.' = 'there are no problems in his youth'
 - **direct speech:** 'Sir!' ... 'Correct.' = he answers all the teacher's questions correctly
 - **listing:** 'I knew the capitals, the Kings and Queens, the dates' = he felt that he knew everything
 - **two important verbs:** 'whooped' = his joy; 'saluted' = his pride
 - **a word emphasised by enjambment at the beginning or end of the line:** 'no hangings' = he was not hanged
 - **use of repetition:** 'the white sleeve of my shirt saluted again and again' = he got a lot of praise

Stanza three

8. 'My mother kept my mascot Gonk / on the TV set for a year' = his parents are proud of him
9. 'The blazer.' / 'The badge.' = he is proud of belonging to the school and winning competitions
10. 'over pink pavements / that girls chalked on, in a blue evening = bright colours portrayed his feelings when he was young
11. 'My country' – the minor sentence conveys the person's feeling of belonging in the country and the empowerment he once felt

Stanza four

12. 'I want it back.' = declaration of his confidence portrays how he longs to feel important and confident
13. He used to be 'the best' but now he has a 'boss' – he is no longer the best in his class
14. Stale; they are embarrassed by him, while his parents were proud
15. Wincing = they are embarrassed by him, while his parents were proud
16. It symbolises his feeling of having a higher status and more confidence when he was a child
17. To create irony = he no longer has the same feelings of belonging or self-confidence
18. He still wants to demonstrate his superior knowledge, but no one is impressed

Comparisons to other poems

1. Similar to 'Litany' as it also deals with childhood memory
2. Similar to 'The Biographer' as it is another dramatic monologue from the point of view of a successful person
3. Contrast to 'The Cliché Kid' – his memories of childhood are happy rather than traumatic
4. Contrast to 'Stafford Afternoons' – his memories of childhood are happy rather than traumatic

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'Litany'

Stanzas one and two

1. Metaphor – suggests that the women's chat about goods is constant and repetitive
2. It is the most important thing in their lives.
3. 'Stiff haired wives'; 'red smiles' – noun phrases – the women appear to be heavily made up; women care a lot about their appearance + rigidly follow social rules of behaviour.
- 4.

<i>A tiny ladder ran up Mrs Barr's American like a rumour.</i>	Simile – suggests that there are tensions gathering and they may gossip about each other.
<i>The tea arranges cracked</i>	Metaphor – suggests their hidden truths to each other about.
<i>sharp hands poised over biscuits</i>	Noun phrase 'sharp hands' – portrays the other.
<i>The Lounge would seem to bristle with eyes</i>	Personification – is used to portray the space where they need to prove themselves 'bristle' implies the hidden tension between of being judged.
<i>Language embarrassed them.</i>	Caesura – highlights the women's inability
<i>An embarrassing word, broken to bits</i>	Enjambment – highlights the way any analysed

Stanzas three and four

5. Abstract noun – the child must learn how to behave in public; they are not allowed to
6. She wants to listen and learn about this society; everyone there is pretending in one
7. Listing – all the personal things the women can't talk to each other about
8. They symbolise the spiteful women and their stifling suburban world
9. Concrete noun – could symbolise the girl's desire to escape
10. Verb – shows the difficulty of escaping
11. Direct speech – the girl finds her own voice; taboo lexis → The girl shocks the women
12. Portray the delight of these experiences as she rebels against the parent
13. The girl's arrival increases the mother's anger, symbolised by the 'storm' (metaphor)
'Then up, minor sentence)
14. 'I'm sorry, Mrs Barr, Mrs Hunt, Mrs Emery, sorry, Mrs Raine' – formal and polite
15. The daughter takes control; the mother is ashamed of her
16. Repetition of 'I'm sorry'; abstract noun 'shame'
17. They reveal the fact that the memory is vivid and perhaps was a turning point in her
values and expectations of her. The verb 'summon' portrays her reliving the experience
mother's conservative attitudes and stifling suburban life.
18. Gustatory imagery shows how vivid the memory still is for her; it would seem an appropriate
mother's point of view because she has said something 'dirty' and needs to be 'clean'

Comparisons to 'The Captain...'

- also about childhood memories, but unpleasant ones this time
- the Captain's mother is proud of him; her mother is ashamed
- he feels a sense of contentment and belonging in the world he grew up in; she rebels

'Nostalgia'

Stanza one

1. a. = imagery of sickness used to convey the way they were harmed by leaving their home
b. 'leaving the mountains, leaving the high, fine air' = portrays the beauty of the place they miss that they miss this
2. a. 'dull', 'crude'
b. 'clenched'
3. 'strange food, the wrong taste' (senses) 'the wrong sounds, / the wrong smells, they were uncomfortable in their new surroundings' and miss the familiarity of home
4. a. 'ache', 'ill', 'killing'
b. 'pining'

Stanza two

5.
 - **oxymoron:** 'sweet pain in the heart'
 - **symbolic references to light:** 'dwindling light of the plains'
 - **references to particular places or memories:** 'a particular place – where maybe a yellow ball in the long grass'
 - **sibilance:** 'sad pipes – summoning'
 - **use of particular verbs:** 'hurt'

Stanza three

6. They didn't leave their home, but suffer from nostalgia because they miss the past. Metaphors 'crying at the workings of memory / through the colour of leaves' and 'the scent of her youth' = particular images recall forgotten memories
7. It's a time for new beginnings and hope – they feel hopeful that they can make a fresh start
8. It draws attention to how few possessions he has with him, suggesting that leaving home is a success
9. 'Same' (contrast with 'wrong' when describing the foreign places) – the travellers are the same as they were when they left
10. It symbolises that a long time has passed since they left and that they can't regain the same
11. 'the same bell / chiming the hour on the clock, and everything changed' = implies that time has passed and they are no longer the same as they were when they left

Comparisons to other poems

- Contrast to the other poems which are lyrical and personal – this one is about a world experience
- Like 'Never Go Back', it also deals with the idea that we change as time passes and the world in which we grew up

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'Stafford Afternoons'

In pairs

Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.

Stanza one

1. 'Only there' = adverb phrase; implies a vivid memory of a place from childhood
'The afternoons could suddenly pause' = metaphor; verb 'could' emphasised by enjambment
slowly for the child, who is possibly bored; could 'have' her desire to explore by the road
2. 'Long road held no one' = personification; implies the emptiness of the neighbourhood
The gardens were empty = qualifier; 'empty' implies the child's isolation
Whether the isolation she is experiencing or promises freedom requires a personal response

Stanzas two, three and four

3. 'I waved at the cars' = dynamic verb 'waved' conveys her desire to communicate
4. 'oddly hurt by the blurred waves back, the speed' = enjambment emphasises 'oddly' and
indifference of the human world to the girl
'Strange boy threw a stone' = dynamic verb 'threw' portrays the violence of the human world
5. 'I let a horse in the noisy field sponge at my palm' = dynamic verb 'sponge' conveys the child's
'I crawled through a hedge into long grass / at the edge of a small wood, lonely and thrilled'
'lonely' and 'thrilled' suggest that she is excited about exploring the natural world on her own
6. 'The green silence gulped once and swallowed me whole.' = personification; wants to escape the world

Stanzas four, five and six

7.
 - **short sentence:** 'I knew it was dangerous.' = caesura creates a sense of tension
 - **long sentence:** 'The way the trees / drew sly faces from light and shade, the way the
back of my neck, / and flowering nettles gathered spit in their throats.' = personification
frightened and overwhelmed in the forest
 - **personification:** 'sticky breath'; 'flowering nettles gathered spit in their throats' = personification
the eyes of the child, who is becoming frightened in the woods
 - **adjective choices:** 'sly' = evaluative; 'a malevolent' = evaluative; presents the forest as malevolent
8. 'Touch' = imperative sentence; presents the man as a predator, wanting to take her
'frightful endearment' = oxymoron; reflects the child's confusion about adult sexual behaviour
'The silence should rush back' = metaphor, emphasised by caesura to convey her shock
9. 'children, who cried and shrieked' = dynamic verbs present the other children's care
their innocence by her encounter with the adult world
'time fell from the sky like a red ball.' = metaphor suggests that the shocking evening has
her grow up too fast.

Comparisons to other poems

- 'Litany' – also about an unpleasant childhood memory; also about a child growing up and
leaving home
- 'The Cliché Kid' – the adult world is portrayed as threatening and disturbing to the child
- 'Beachcomber' – contrast between the innocence of the child in 'Beachcomber' and the adult world
tainted by the adult world

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'Before You Were Mine'

Discussion in groups

1. Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.
2. Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.
3. That once the woman is a mother, she belongs to her child; the poetic speaker tries to remember what her mother was like before her birth.

Stanza one

1. 'laugh'; 'shriek' – fun, carefree
2. Marilyn Monroe – icon of 1950s glamour; 'the mother's glamour when she was young' – 'Jean Duff, Maggie McGee' – remembers the names of her mother's friends – 'poor' – important to her mother and she talked about them to her daughter

Stanza two

3. 'the ballroom with the thousand eyes, the fizzy, movie tomorrows' – metaphors – 'coincidental encounters and adventures her mother might have had; the adjective 'fizzy' suggests excitement
4. 'I', 'me', 'mine' = first-person pronouns; implies that there is a clear separation between her when she was young and carefree and later after she had a child
'You' = second-person pronoun; creates a conversational tone, as if she is exploring her relationship with her mother; creates a sense of intimacy between them.
5. Mirrors her mother's youthful voice; contributes to the idea of youth being fun and carefree
6. 'I'm not here yet' – portrays the idea that her mother's life was different before she had her
'You reckon it's worth it' = presents her mother's defiance of her parents' rules

Stanza three

7. 'The decade ahead of my loud, possessive yell was the best one, eh?'
'till I see you, clear as scent, under the tree, / with its lights, and whose small bites of life' – The speaker tries to imagine how her mother felt in her youth; creates a conversational tone
8. It refers to the child's cry and how the newborn dominated every aspect of the mother's life
9. They have connotations of glamour; 'relic' implies that this glamour belongs to the mother and is considered special and precious
10. She feels that she can recreate an image of her mother's past through the process of remembering; 'I'm almost there, in the way I see her mother'

Stanza four

11. 'You'd teach me the steps on the way home from Mass, / stamping stars from the wall' – 'stamping' suggest that her mother passed on her joy for life to her daughter; 'passing on' – nevertheless gave her daughter a traditional upbringing
12. 'sparkle and waltz and laugh' = triad of verbs conveying her mother's energy and vitality

Comparisons to other poems

- Contrast to 'Litany', 'The Cliché Kid' and 'Stafford Afternoons' – the adult (the mother) is the central character
- Similar to 'The Captain' as it portrays youth as a time of confidence and joyfulness

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1. 'I need help'; 'Give me a shot'
2. It highlights how he's haunted by traumatic childhood memories.
3. It recreates the process of remembering.
4. 'My father's ballgown'; 'Ma ... boozing'
5. 'A shot'; 'boozing'; 'pissing'

6. Find in the poem three and four:

- words that convey the distress and loneliness of the persona: ‘unpopular’, ‘dislike’
- an example of hyperbole which reflects his isolation as a child: ‘The kid so unpopular’
- minor sentences: ‘Bonkers’
- alliteration: ‘Butch in my boots’
- colloquial language: ‘Butch’; ‘Bonkers’

7.

- **the use of imperatives**
'Give me a break'; 'Don't let me pine' – wants to escape the painful memories
- **the use of antithesis to contrast present desolation with past joy**
'pine' / 'easy laugh'

8. 'the smell the smell' = he is fixated on particular memories
9. The sensory imagery recreates details of the past
10. She might suggest that everyone feels nostalgic about the same kind of things and s for the past

- Contrast to the usually traumatic, rather than happy, childhood memories
- Like 'Sri Lanka's Skull' – the character is also mentally disturbed and troubled by the war
- Same formal structure (dramatic monologue) as 'The Biographer' and 'The Captain'
- Different tone from other poems – mocking, sardonic, playful at times despite the tragedy

1. Because it is about the way that our past experiences still affect us in the present.
2. She feels that she has changed so much since childhood that her former self is almost unrecognisable.
3. The purpose is to recall precise details from the past. The questions could be addressed to her, suggesting that the experience of needing to get back in touch with your past is universal.
4. 'Go for the sound of the sea, / don't try to describe it, / get it into your head' = **imperative** – the memory by recalling the sounds.
'the platinum blaze of the sun' = **colour imagery**; tries to summon up the exact image.
5. **Metaphor** = the metaphor is very clear and vivid, not like a faded old photograph
6. It suggests that she realises that the event must be important because she remembers it so clearly. It suggests exactly what deep, symbolic meaning it has in her life.
7. 'Harder'
8. It could imply that the poetic speaker is urging her older self to 'listen' and reconnect with her childhood innocence and purity. It suggests something important about herself and how she has changed.
9. 'But this is all I can get.' – suggests that she can never truly access the past or her childhood.
10. 'Those / whose shaking, hands cannot touch' (long line)
'the child / who cannot touch' (short line)

Enjambment emphasises **verb** '[cannot] touch', implying the separation between the old and the new.

11. The poetic speaker forces herself / the reader to realise that the idea that she can return to her childhood is impossible.
12. 'what would you have to say, / of all people, / to her / given the chance?' – **interrogative** – suggests that the adult are so different they could never understand each other.

Comparisons to other poems

- In the same way that in 'Before You were Mine' the persona wants to connect with (her mother), she wants to reconnect here with her younger self
- Like 'Litany', 'Stafford Afternoons' and 'The Captain', it is about childhood memories, a time of innocence (contrast to 'Litany' and 'Stafford Afternoons')
- Like 'Nostalgia', it is about how it's impossible to go back to the past

'Small Female Skull'

The skull = a reminder of her mother

1. 'It cannot cry, holds me as long as I exhale' = adverb 'only'
'I rinse it under the tap to watch the dust run away, like sand / from a swimming cap'
2. 'a deck of cards, a slim volume of verse' = small objects; suggest that after we die our lives are like a deck of cards, the 'cards' could symbolise the fate that guides human life
3. 'papery bone' = noun phrase
4. 'my warm lips to its papery bone' = she kisses the skull; therefore, accepts death
'Love, I murmur to my skull, then louder, other grand words, / shouting the hollow truth'
The persona realises that the thought of death makes all the things we consider important in life seem trivial.

The skull = her younger self

5.
 - 'but with something else, as though it could levitate. Disturbing.'
Verb 'levitate' = suggests the power that the memories of her former life still have
 - 'I see the scar where I fell for sheer love / down treacherous stairs, and read the story'
Noun 'scar'; simile; = imply that she is reflecting on painful memories from the past
 - 'press my ear to its grin. A vanishing sigh.'
Minor sentence = suggests that she is pained by memories of the past
6.
 - 'my warm lips to its papery bone' = suggests her love for her past self
 - 'then dry it – first-born – gently'
 - Metaphor = feels that her younger self was fragile and in need of protection
 - 'See, I hold her face in trembling, papery hands'
Adjectives 'trembling, papery' = imply she feels strong emotions

The skull = a symbol of her isolation and depression

7.
 - 'dim and vulnerable'
'For the first time, I sit on the lavatory seat with my head / in my hands, appalled'
 - **isolated and unable to communicate with others**
'Downstairs they will think I have lost my mind.'
 - **haunted by painful memories**
'read that shattering day like braille.'

Comparisons to other poems

- Like 'The Cliché Kid' – the persona is troubled by the past and mentally unstable
- Sense of the persona's isolation, like 'Stafford Afternoons'
- Sense of disconnection from people close to her and the implication that she has suffered from mental health issues
'Never Go Back'

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'First Love'

Match-up

'a dream' = abstract noun

'clench' = dynamic verb

'as close to my lips as lipstick' = simile

'unfocused' = adjective

'slow speed' = sibilance

1. 'as close to my lips as lipstick' = simile; suggests that the dream brings back an intense memory of her lover had shared
2. 'silence of years' = metaphor
3. It conveys how important the lover still is to her, despite their separation
4. It suggests how deeply she still feels for the lover; it may also convey the fact that she is 'unfocused' due to the dream
5. 'a garden growing with light' = implies that the world seems changed for her due to the dream, as if experiencing a result of the dream
6. 'clench' = dynamic verb, suggesting the effort she is making in trying to bring back the memory of her lover
7. 'old film played at a slow speed' = metaphor used to suggest that she wants to revisit the memory of her lover
8. 'tear' = concrete noun
9. It is a verb belonging to the semantic field of communication, suggesting that the poem is about communicating to her through her dream
10. 'Such faithfulness' = implies that even though she has been apart for many years from her lover, she is still loving him/her
11. You smile in my head = metaphor
12. 'flowers suddenly pierce and sweeten the air' = antithesis between the verbs 'pierce' and 'sweeten'

Comparisons to other poems

- Similar to 'Mean Time' – about separation from a partner
- Contrast to 'Close' – the relationship is idealised
- Contrast to 'Valentine' which is about the beginning of a relationship as opposed to the end; however, the same idea of the possessiveness of love features in both poems

'Never Go Back'

Discussion

1. Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.
2. Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.
3. Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.

In pairs

1. Death and disease: 'living dead'; 'ghost'

Stanzas one and two

1. Conveys the depressing atmosphere of the bar where people drink because they have to; suggests that her former friends are no longer an active part of her life.
2. The personification as well as the dynamic verb 'cracked' implies that the former friends are no longer the same as they only have the past in common. The antithesis implies that they try to fill the void with talk. The use of enjambment highlights the abstract noun 'time', implying that time is passing and encounters are fleeting.
3. Metaphors: 'agreed motifs, anecdotes shared / from a well-thumbed past' describes the conversation with former friends in this way in order to imply that they have a shared knowledge of each other's past.
4. Suggests that the speaker feels that she is no longer the same person that she used to be.
5. 'you let me in till it died.' = the personification of time suggests that too much time has passed and therefore, the relationship with the people and the place has broken down.
6. Pathetic fallacy and personification ('tired wind') → the description of the environment as one of despair as she tries to connect with her former home. The personification of the wind as 'tired' suggests that these conversations are futile.
7. 'the alcoholic, whose head is a negative of itself'. – metaphor; suggests a wasted life.

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8. 'So drink up. Shut up' (imperative sentences) → imply her desire to dull the pain of before she can leave it again
9. Structure: Parallel phrasing is used with the repetition of 'never return' or 'never go back' implies her feeling that she has to sever every connection to the place

Stanzas three and four

10. The house... has cancer; / each groan and creak / accusing as you climb the stairs disease used in relation to the house presents it as a threatening environment has of the place
11. Accusing = verb, emphasised by enjambment implies that she feels guilty about her former home
12. 'Your loved body' ... 'sighs' ... 'never of loss' – she seemed to have had a relationship with the house
13. The verb 'disappears' creates a sense of tension and that she is desperate to escape the house, 'disappears' at the end of the stanza, which suggests that she has left the memories behind
14. Caesura 'cancer' and 'loss' to portray how she associates the house with pain; the pause created implies the breakdown in communication between her and her old home
15. Words emphasised by enjambment:
Abstract noun 'lies' – could suggest that deceit led to her previous relationship ending that she feels indebted to her friends for what they meant to her in the past, but she lacks the affection that she feels she should; concrete noun 'negative' – implies the way her life is run down by life in the town

Stanzas five and six

16. A taxi implying a hearse takes you slowly – 'hearse' (concrete noun) implies that her 'slowly' portrays her frustration as she is desperate to leave town quickly
17. 'A theme park with no theme' – metaphor – suggests the town's loss of identity; the town's vulgarity
18. 'The places you knew have changed their names' – the past tense verb 'knew' suggests her former town; 'Neon, cheap tricks' (noun phrase) – the town is portrayed as cheap and vulgar; 'a drenched whore to stare you full in the face' = verb 'stare' portrays the town's inhospitable nature
19. 'You pay to get out' – verb 'pay' and the phrase 'get out' suggest her desperation 'an emigrant' = concrete noun; implies that she is leaving permanently
20. 'The train sighs' - verb 'sighs' suggests sadness; 'rewinding the city like a film' – simile comparing the town to a film
21. 'Already' suggests that the town's welcome is insincere; verb 'welcome' implies that the town's imagery of comfort and warmth implies the comfort that she can now only experience through memories

Comparisons to other poems

- Similar to 'Nostalgia' – persona returns to a place where they once lived to find it changed
- Similar to 'Small Female Skull' – painful memories of the past
- Contrast to 'The Captain', where the persona wants to return to the past

'Valentine'

In pairs

Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.

Debate – two groups

Requires a personal response. Answers will vary.

Questions on the poem

1. 'Not a red rose or a satin heart' / Not a cute card or a kissogram.
(concrete noun phrase 'red rose', 'satin heart', 'cute card' refer to popular Valentine's cards)
2. 'a moon upon a turn of town paper' = metaphor, implies that love can be a surprising thing (concrete noun 'moon')
'It promises light / like the careful undressing of love' = simile; the onion's layers are compared to the lovers (or to the way in which people gradually begin to reveal their inner selves)
3. 'It will make your reflection / a wobbling photo of grief' = metaphor which presents the idea of grief as a reflection
'It will blind you with tears / like a love' = simile; the onion's ability to induce tears is compared to love's ability to bring tears

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4. **Oxymoron**; suggests that the love is passionate and desperate
5. To emphasise the poetic speaker's complete devotion to their lover
6. 'as we are, / for as long as we are.' = implies either their lifelong commitment to each other or that the speaker might suggest that their relationship might end one day, so they make a forceful attempt to be united with their lover at any cost
8. The verb 'shrink' has connotations of entrapment, suggesting that obsessive love can be suffocating
9. 'Lethal' = **minor sentence**, on a **separate line**
'knife' = **concrete noun**; connotations of death and pain, implying the emotional suffering

Comparisons to 'First Love'

- contrast – about the beginning of a relationship as opposed to a reflection on one that has ended
- similarity – the persona imagines this love to last forever
- contrast – poem about the problems that love can bring, while in 'First Love' love is idealised

'Close'

In groups

- **Imperative sentences**:
The sense of the lovers' mutual imprisonment is also highlighted by the imperative 'Put out the light' and 'Put out the light' 'the door'
- **Imagery of light**: 'Put out the light' = might imply a desire to deny the truth about the relationship
- **Imagery of darkness**: conveys their despair and the abstract noun 'journey' might suggest that the relationship has come to an end. The personification of their 'childhoods' which watch them 'take away' their former innocence with their savage hostility.
- **Metaphor**: The lover is described almost like a hunter, trapping her by 'moving in close'
- **Simple sentences**: 'Love won't give in' = implies that she doesn't want to give up on the relationship
- **Minor sentences**: such as 'undress' and the direct address to the lover 'you have me on your tongue' imply that the physical closeness of the relationship still exists. On the other hand, the persona as 'homeless' implies that she has lost the sense of security that the relationship once provided
- Important words highlighted by **enjambment**: 'secret' = could imply that their relationship was not open with each other
The use of the verbs 'shake' and 'shout' = conveys the emotional distress felt by the persona
The simile through which the persona is described as 'black as our mouth' suggests that the persona is unable to communicate with each other
- **Parallelism**: stanzas 1 and 5 begin with imperative sentences and stanzas 2 and 4 begin with simple sentences, creating a sense of tension as the persona seems to be commanding the lover in a threatening way
- **Personification**: The memories shared by the couple are suggested by the personification of the speaker seems to suggest that the troubles and secrets of the past might have led to the current state of the relationship implied by the symbolic 'suitcase crammed with secrets'. The change of the relationship is suggested by the personification of the years which 'stand outside' and look on pityingly at the way the relationship has changed through time, while the 'ghosts' of the lovers imply that some of their original feelings remain
- **The motif of rooms and houses**: 'the bedroom', 'the bedside table' = the intimate setting of the relationship
- **Repetition**: 'Undress' – could imply a desire to know the full truth about her lover and the relationship
- **The use of pronouns**: second-person pronoun you = creates a direct address to the lover, while the first-person plural we is used to refer to their former selves as completely separate from their present selves, suggesting that the relationship has changed

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'The Biographer'

Stanza 1

1. The verb and line length emphasise the biographer's idolisation of the author.
2. It suggests that the biographer cannot exist without the author and that he will always be defined by him.
3. 'an early daguerreotype shows you / excitedly staring out / from behind your face, / yourself / still visibly there,'
4. This verb suggests the biographer's inadequacy in comparison to the author.

Stanza 2

5. The biographer's materialism = 'materialism' (noun phrase)
The writer's superior materialism = 'Your wallpaper green and crimson and gold'
6. It creates a sense of the biographer's realisation of his inferiority to the writer and the writer's superiority.
7. Verbs = 'needed', 'noticed' – suggests that the biographer would never have been able to write without the writer's help; short sentence length creates a bitter tone
Enjambment emphasises the abstract noun 'rage' = suggests a change of feeling towards the writer; the biographer starts to resent his inferiority
8. 'Guilt and rage hardened me' = metaphor – conveys the biographer's frustration at his inferiority

Stanza 3

9. It suggests that she is a more important biographer than him.
10. He is creating images of the people (seemingly from an urban, working-class environment) to see them for himself and walk in his footsteps, but he feels uncomfortable doing so.
11. 'Stew', 'sniffed', 'stood', 'spoke' = recreate the claustrophobia the biographer feels in the writer's world.
12. He sees himself as inferior to the talented writer.
13. 'meagre' = adjective; 'spat' = verb

Stanza 4

14. 'Monster. Mommy's boy.' = different theories about what the writer was really like; the biographer creates different versions of him
15. 'I write you and I write you' = repetition suggests the biographer's obsession to understand the writer
16. 'I have an affair with a thespian girl' = the biographer wants to prove his masculinity; 'I snivel home to my wife' = 'snivel' implies his weakness as he needs his wife's support
17. 'You would have a right to' (verb) = the biographer wants to emulate the author's achievements

Similarities between 'The Biographer' and 'The Captain...'

- Dramatic monologues from the point of view of male personas
- Male personas experience feelings of failure
- Both compare themselves to more successful figures

Differences

- The captain experienced success in his youth
- The biographer admires the more successful writer and wants to emulate him

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'Mean Time'

1. **Personification**; suggests that time, and perhaps life, has passed without her noticing
2. 'mourning our love' = verb 'mourning' implies that their love is dead
'unmendable rain' = adjective unmendable suggests that their relationship cannot be fixed
3. 'unmendable rain', 'bleak streets', 'darkening sky' = the oppressive environment mirrors her relationship
4. Suggests a possibility that things might have turned out differently in the relationship
5. Feelings of angst and confusion
6. 'The sky could lift one hour from this day' = suggests that she wishes that she had the power to change the past so she could avoid saying the hurtful things that they have said to each other which led to their relationship ending
7. Direct address to the lover = intimate, personal, intimate tone, as if the poem was directed at the reader
8. Creates a 'volta' (a change of direction in the argument of the poem) as she realises that her relationship is over
9. Implies that the poetic persona, her lover and the reader are all united by our shared experience of time
10. The light symbolises life, hope; perhaps the line is short to reveal how these things are fleeting
11. 'shortened days' / 'endless nights' = the noun phrase 'shortened days' reflects the passage of time and how little time we have left
Paradoxically, however, the noun phrase 'endless nights' implies that when we are in a state of despair, time seems never-ending
12. 'beyond all light' = presents the hopelessness of the persona (SHORT LINE)
'as I walked through the wrong part of town' = mirrors her feeling of disorientation and being lost
'stole light from my life' = enjambment highlights the realisation of her mortality
13. 'hour', 'days', 'day' = words from the semantic field of time to reflect the way life and time are perceived

Comparisons to 'Close'

- Both poems deal with an unhappy relationship where the lovers have committed mistakes
- In 'Close', the lovers are struggling to save their relationship but in 'Mean Time' it has ended
- Imagery of darkness is used in both to portray the miserable state of the characters
- Both poems show how a relationship can change through time

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Exam Preparation

AS Level questions

- Possible topic sentences:
 - While 'Valentine' deals with the beginning of a relationship, 'Close' is focused on ending.
 - Both poems explore the pain that love can bring.
 - Both poems use patterns of imagery to explore the nature of relationships.
- Possible topic sentences:
 - While 'The Captain' portrays life as a time of happiness and success, the poem explores the mistakes she and her partner made in the past.
 - In both poems, the personas are disillusioned with the present.
 - Both poems portray how, over time, the relationships of their characters with their partners have deteriorated.
- Possible topic sentences:
 - While in 'Nostalgia' the mercenaries long to return to the place where they used to live, the persona dreads this return.
 - The characters in both poems find the place where they once lived changed with time.
 - While the persona in 'Never Go Back' has found a new place where she belongs, the mercenaries in 'Nostalgia' never adjust to the places they travel to.
- Possible topic sentences:
 - While in 'Litany' the young girl uses language as a form of rebellion against her parents, the poem explores the breakdown of communication between lovers.
 - Both poems portray the potential of language to harm relationships.
 - Both poems suggest that there are certain things which are never openly discussed.
- Possible topic sentences:
 - Both poems focus on childhood memories.
 - 'Stafford Afternoons' is about the persona's transition from childhood to adulthood with the theme of childhood and innocence.
 - Both poems explore children's desire to explore their environment.
- Possible topic sentences:
 - 'The Cliché Kid' deals with childhood memories while 'First Love' focuses on the persona's first love.
 - The persona in 'The Cliché Kid' is disturbed by his/her memories, while the persona in 'First Love' is nostalgic for the memories of the lover.
 - In both poems, the memories are vivid and still have a strong impact on the characters.

A Level questions – Poetic Voices

- Possible topic sentences (using 'Close' as the other poem):
 - 'Valentine' deals with the beginning of a relationship, as the persona tempts the lover.
 - 'Valentine' suggests that true love is different to the idealised version common in popular culture.
 - 'Close' is focused on a relationship which seems to be ending.
 - 'Close' explores the pain that love can bring.
- Possible topic sentences (using 'Never Go Back' as the other poem):
 - In 'Nostalgia', the passing of time is seen as bringing a sense of sadness and loss.
 - In 'Nostalgia', places and people seem to be changed by time.
 - In 'Never Go Back', the persona has painful memories of the past.
 - In 'Never Go Back', the persona has found that time has changed her and made her feel like she was once close to.
- Possible topic sentences (using 'The Cliché Kid' as the other poem):
 - In 'Litany', the language of the adult women masks their real thoughts.
 - In 'Litany', the child uses taboo language to rebel against the conservative atmosphere.
 - Language is used in 'The Cliché Kid' to mock the typical set-up of psychoanalysis.
 - In 'The Cliché Kid', the writer explores the limitations of language to express pain.

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4. Possible topic sentences (using 'Stafford Afternoons' as the other poem):
 - In 'Beachcomber', childhood is presented as a time of innocence and close connection to nature.
 - In 'Beachcomber', the adult persona finds herself greatly changed since her childhood.
 - 'Stafford Afternoons' focuses on the persona's transition from childhood to adulthood.
 - In 'Stafford Afternoons', the adult world is presented as threatening to the childhood persona.
5. Possible topic sentences (using 'The Captain...' as the other poem):
 - 'The Cliché Kid' portrays painful memories of the persona's formative years.
 - In 'The Cliché Kid', the persona is still haunted by past memories and feels unable to move on.
 - 'The Captain' uses a persona filled with childhood memories of his success.
 - The present disillusionment of the persona in 'The Captain' forms a stark contrast to his childhood happiness.



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Appendix: Poem Comparison Table

	'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team'	'Nostalgia'	'Before You Were Mine'	'Beachcomber'	'First Love'	'Valentine'	'The Biographer'	'Litany'	A
'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team'									
'Nostalgia'									
'Before You Were Mine'									
'Beachcomber'									
'First Love'									
'Valentine'									
'The Biographer'									
'Litany'									
'Stafford Afternoons'									
'The Cliché Kid'									
'Small Female Skull'									
'Never Go Back'									
'Close'									
'Mean Time'									

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