

## Storm on the Island

- 1 How would you describe the speaker's tone of voice from the words below? Tick the correct answer.

calm  uncertain  cynical  nothing  angry  fearful  [1]
- 2 How have the islanders adapted for the storms?

..... [1]
- 3 What is the landscape of the island like?

..... [1]
- 4 What does the speaker say about trees and the sea?

..... [2]
- 5 Pick out three words that are military terms used to describe the storm.

..... [3]
- 6 What does the use of the pronouns 'we' and 'our' suggest about the islanders?

..... [1]
- 7 Pick one striking use of alliteration and assonance in the poem. What is the effect?

..... [2]
- 8 The storm is an attack of 'nothing' (19). Explain what the poet means by this oxymoron.

..... [1]
- 9 Who do you think the speaker is talking to? Why does the speaker try to reassure his listener?

..... [2]

## Bayonet Charge

- 1 The poem starts very abruptly, as if in the middle of a narrative. What is one effect of this?

..... [1]
- 2 Comment on the poet's use of punctuation in the first verse. How would you describe its effect?

..... [2]
- 3 What do you understand by the simile in line 6?

..... [1]
- 4 How does the pace of the poem seem to slow down in the second verse? At what point does the action recommence?

..... [2]
- 5 Look again at line 1 and the simile in lines 12–14. What do these lines suggest about the impact this experience had on the soldier?

..... [1]
- 6 What is your response to the image of the hare in lines 16–18?

..... [1]
- 7 'King, honour, human dignity, etcetera' (20). Why are these 'luxuries' to the soldier?

..... [1]
- 8 Why do you think has the poet chosen to write this poem using the third person?

..... [1]
- 9 How does the poet capture the soldier's sense of rising terror in the final verse?

..... [1]
- 10 What happens to the soldier's sense of patriotism in the final lines?

..... [1]

# Poem Overviews 3: Poppies

Poppies are symbolic of those who have died in war.

Three days before Armistice Sunday  
and poppies had already been placed  
on individual war graves. Before you left,  
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,  
5 spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade  
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

'crimped' and 'spasms' subvert the poppy's symbolic representation of peace.

Alliteration emphasises her attempt to control her feelings.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,  
I rounded up as many white cat hairs  
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's  
10 upturned collar, steeled the softening

Metaphor suggests he is too grown up to want signs of affection from his mother.

of my face. I wanted to graze my nose  
across the tip of your nose, play at  
being Eskimos like we did when  
you were little. I resisted the impulse  
15 to run my fingers through the gelled  
blackthorns of your hair. All my words  
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

Dramatic verb 'threw it open' suggests speed and decisiveness.

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked  
with you, to the front door, threw  
20 it open, the world overflowing  
like a treasure chest. A split second  
and you were away, intoxicated.

Imagery suggests she is turning her emotions inwards.

Suggests his excitement at the experience that awaits him.

After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,  
released a song bird from its cage.

25 Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,  
and this is where it has led me,  
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy  
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without  
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

'playground voice' is a reference to his childhood and links to lines 11–14.

30 On reaching the top of the hill I traced  
the inscriptions on the war memorial,  
leaned against it like a wishbone.  
The dove pulled freely against the sky,  
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear  
35 your playground voice catching on the wind.

'wishbone' may have two meanings: a) she is bent double (bent at the waist in a stooped position) by the force of her loss; b) she wishes he would return safely.



Key:

Metaphor

Simile

Symbols of remembrance and peace

Maternal love

## About the Poem

- The poem was written by Jane Weir and commissioned for a collection, *Exit Wounds*, published by *The Guardian* newspaper in 2009.
- A mother describes the day her son left home to join the army. She struggles to contain her emotions as she pins a poppy to his lapel.
- After he has gone she releases her emotions by visiting his bedroom and later visits a local war memorial and remembers him.

## Ideas, Themes and Issues

- **Women and conflict:** The poem explores the feelings of a mother left behind and the pain of loss she feels. This reminds the reader that many women have been in her situation in past wars. Mothers, grandmothers, wives and sisters also feel the effects of conflict in their feelings of worry and grief for male relatives, though they may not be directly involved in battle.
- **Ambiguity:** It is not clear whether the speaker's son is one of the dead in the war graves. The opening of the poem could be read as a mother sending her son off to school instead of (as we later realise) to join the army. The mother's pain is made clear (words such as 'bandaged' in line 7; the way she finds it hard to speak in lines 16–18 and the way her stomach is in knots in line 28 show this). We do not know how much time has elapsed between her visit to his bedroom and her walk to the war memorial, or what has happened to him in between. There are several areas of ambiguity in the poem, suggesting that the speaker is struggling to express those same emotions that she fought to conceal from her son. The way that she starts many of her sentences in the middle of the line also indicates how emotional she is feeling.
- Domestic imagery ('sellotape', 'cat hairs') at the start contrasts with the symbols of remembrance and peace ('poppies', 'dove'), and the language of maternal love ('run my fingers through the gelled [hair] (15)) makes it painfully clear how difficult it must be to let a child go to war.

## Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is a **dramatic monologue** written in the **first person**. This form allows the reader into the inner emotions of the speaker. The mother laments the loss of her son. The moment of their parting is a collection of the small things she focused on in order to keep her emotions in check.
- The opening is ominous with the mention of Armistice Sunday and war graves, which are juxtaposed with her son's departure. The use of **similes** (21) and **metaphors** (15) further heighten the emotional response of the reader.



### Key Words

**Ambiguity**  
**Dramatic monologue**  
**First person**  
**Simile**  
**Metaphor**

### Quick Test

1. How does the poet show feelings about conflict in the poem?
2. What does the poet suggest conflict is like for those left behind?
3. What do the songbird and the dove represent?

## Storm on the Island

- 1 How is nature presented in the poem? ..... [1]
- 2 Select two phrases where the speaker directly addresses the listener/reader. What is the effect of this conversational tone?  
..... [2]
- 3 Why does the poet choose the phrase 'exploding comfortably' (13) to describe the sea's actions?  
..... [1]
- 4 What is the extended metaphor that the poet uses in the second half of the poem?  
..... [1]
- 5 How are the islanders presented in the poem? Choose from the following:  
**passive      sad      brave      resigned      terrified      resilient      angry** [1]
- 6 What does the speaker realise in the final line?  
..... [1]
- 7 In what ways does the speaker create a sense of the islander community in the poem?  
..... [1]
- 8 What do the references to 'company' (6, 12) mean in the poem?  
..... [2]
- 9 The speaker lists several negatives in the poem and is aware of the dangers presented by the storm. Is his overall tone positive or negative?  
..... [1]
- 10 Are wider political connotations suggested by the situation in the poem? What other kinds of 'empty air' (18) are we 'bombarded' (18) with?  
..... [1]

## Bayonet Charge

- 1 What is the effect of starting the poem with the word, 'Suddenly'?  
..... [1]
- 2 How does the language in the third line seem to enact a sense of 'stumbling' through mud?  
..... [1]
- 3 What is unusual about the image used to describe the hedge?  
..... [1]
- 4 Which two emotions are juxtaposed at the end of the first verse?  
..... [2]
- 5 Find an example of enjambment that conveys the sense that the soldier 'almost stopped' (9) going forwards.  
..... [1]
- 6 What is one effect of juxtaposing nature with the violence of battle?  
..... [1]
- 7 The soldier asks himself a question in the second verse. In your own words, explain what he is questioning at that moment.  
..... [1]
- 8 What prompts the soldier to continue his forward charge in the third verse?  
..... [1]
- 9 Comment on the poet's use of imagery in the final two lines.  
..... [1]  
..... [1]
- 10 In what ways could the poem be described as a description of a recurring traumatic memory?  
..... [1]  
..... [1]

# Poem Analysis: Comparing Poems

## Understanding the Question

- In the exam you will be asked to compare two poems from the anthology cluster you have studied.
- The questions will ask you to compare a named poem, which will be printed on the paper, with another poem of your choice from the same cluster.
- A list of all the poems in the cluster will be printed for you as a reminder, but you will not have them in front of you.
- Therefore you must make sure you know all the poems really well so you can write a good comparison answer.
- Your answer needs to include:
  - Your understanding and response to the poems.
  - Textual references (quotations or paraphrases) that support your interpretations.
  - Appropriate use of subject terminology.
  - Analysis of the language, form and structure of the poems.
  - Analysis of the poets' methods and how they use them to achieve meanings and effects.
  - Reference to and understanding of the relationships between poems and the contexts in which they were written.
- The question will usually start with the word 'Compare' and a poem from the cluster will be specified in the question. You must use this as one of the poems in your comparison. You then need to choose another poem from the cluster for your comparison.
- Make sure the poem you choose for your second comparison poem is suitable for the exam question.
- You will have no choice of question, so it is important that the poem you choose has enough similarity and difference with the given poem, and is appropriate for the question.
- For example, look at this question:

Compare the ways that poets present ideas about the effects of conflict in 'Exposure' and one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

- You will always be asked to write about the poets' **presentation**. This means you must show understanding of the poets' methods: structure, language, choice, techniques, tone and attitude.
- Be aware that you can talk about the ideas and theme of the poem, but this alone will not earn you high marks.
- Examiners are looking for a sophisticated **analysis** and exploration of poetic methods and their effects.
- Students who offer different personal interpretations will also be highly rewarded.



### Key Point

Remember that you will only have the named poem in front of you, so make sure you know all the poems really well.



## Using Comparison Grids

- When you are revising, it may be helpful to use comparison grids to organise your ideas about the poems side by side. Decide on two poems to compare at a time.
- The grid might look like this:

Question focus: e.g. Poets' presentation of the the effect of conflict.		
	Poem 1	Poem 2
Themes and ideas – similar – different		
Structure and form – similar – different		
Language features (imagery, repetition, interesting word choices, alliteration, etc.) – similar – different		
Tone and attitude – similar – different		
Personal response and interpretations		

- Remember that your comparison must consider similarities and differences. You do not need to talk about both of these equally, but you must always be comparing both poems.
- A very common error is to talk about one poem in detail and make only passing mention of the other poem. Plan well so you have plenty to write about on both poems.
- In the exam you may prefer to **annotate** (underline or highlight) parts of the poem given in the question with comparison points for your second poem written alongside.
- This can work well, but it's a good idea to use a comparison grid similar to the one above when you are practising comparison answers, to help you get into the habit of organising your ideas under the right headings.



### Key Point

Using a comparison grid can be especially helpful when revising the poems.



### Key Point

It is vital that you remember to write about both poems, comparing their similarities and differences in relation to the question. Do not talk about just one poem in detail.

### Key Words

Presentation  
Analysis  
Annotate

# Mixed Exam-Style Questions

**Note:** In the exam, each question will only refer to one poem. You will need to choose the other poem. For the purposes of these exam-style questions, a poem has been suggested, (in brackets) to make the comparison with. This is shown in the answer section at the back of the book.

**1** **Ozymandias** (Compare with *My Last Duchess*)

Compare how poets present ideas about the effects of power in 'Ozymandias' and in **one** other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks

**2** **London** (Compare with *The Emigrée*)

Compare the ways poets present feelings about power in 'London' and **one** other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks

**3** **The Emigrée** (Compare with *Poppies*)

Compare the ways poets present feelings about separation because of conflict in 'The Emigrée' and **one** other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks

**4** *Tissue* (Compare with *Checking Out Me History*)

Compare how poets present attitudes to personal power and identity in 'Tissue' and in **one** other poem from 'Power and conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks

**5** *Bayonet Charge* (Compare with *Exposure*)

Compare how poets present attitudes to warfare in 'Bayonet Charge' and in **one** other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks

**6** *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Compare with *Bayonet Charge*)

Compare the methods poets use to explore ideas about patriotism in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and in **one** other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

*Continue your answer on a separate piece of paper.*

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30 marks