

# GCSE Unseen Poetry

## Booklet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## How to Close Read a Poem: The Process

### STEP 1: Highlight the key word in the question

### STEP 2: Read the poem ... twice.

- Who is speaking?
- Who is being addressed?
- What is the speaker talking about?
- Where is the poem set?

### STEP 3:

- What is the poem about thematically?
- What attitude does the poem express towards this theme?
  - What idea is the poem about? Does it seem happy, sad or angry about this idea?

### STEP 4:

- Highlight the three most important and interesting images in the poem
- Highlight any other interesting words in the poem
- Does the tone shift at any point?
- How does the poem begin and end?
- How does the poem utilise form?
  - I like / I am puzzled by / I am interested in

***What is the poem doing? How is it doing it? Why is it doing it in that way?***

## **Love in the Time of the Coronavirus**

### **by Nikita Gill**

Today, we stockpile empathy.  
We supply love and good energy.  
We sing to each other across buildings.  
We said 'I love you' through social distancing.

Do you know that writing letters  
to our friends is back in fashion?  
And that we finally have time to read more books,  
whether historical or fiction?

My cousin told me she hadn't seen  
such a blue sky in her city before.  
My uncle went on his first walk in the woods.  
He heard a bird sing since the first time he went to war.

Even in sickness, this world  
is allowed to be beautiful.  
And we are still allowed to love it,  
for there is always room for hope.

This is just me checking in  
sending you the moon as a poem,  
praying and wishing for us all  
a speedy recovery.

And if nothing else,  
There will always be poetry.  
We will always have poetry.

**In 'Love in the Time of the Coronavirus', how does the poet present the effects of the crisis?**

## In Oak Terrace

by Tony Connor

Old and alone, she sits at nights,  
Nodding before the television.  
The house is quiet now. She knits,  
rises to put the kettle on,  
  
watches a cowboy's killing, reads  
the local Births and Deaths, and falls  
asleep at 'Growing stock-piles of war-heads'.  
A world that threatens worse ills  
  
fades. She dreams of life spent  
in the one house: suffers again  
poverty, sickness, abandonment,  
a child's death, a brother's brain  
  
melting to madness. Seventy years  
of common trouble; the kettle sings.  
At midnight she says her silly prayers,  
And takes her teeth out, and collects her night-things.

## Reading an Unseen Poetry

### STEP 1: Read

- Who is speaking?
- Who is being addressed?
- What is the speaker talking about?
- Where is the poem set?

### STEP 2: Read

- What is the poem about thematically?
- What attitude does the poem express towards this idea?
- What idea is the poem about? Does it seem happy, sad or angry about this idea?

### STEP 3: Annotate

- Highlight the three most important and interesting images in the poem
- Highlight any other interesting words in the poem
- Does the tone shift at any point?
- How does the poem begin and end?
- How does the poem utilise form?
- I like / I am puzzled by / I am interested in

## Those Winter Sundays

by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

### Reading an Unseen Poetry

#### STEP 1: Read

- Who is speaking?
- Who is being addressed?
- What is the speaker talking about?
- Where is the poem set?

#### STEP 2: Read

- What is the poem about thematically?
- What attitude does the poem express towards this idea?
- What idea is the poem about? Does it seem happy, sad or angry about this idea?

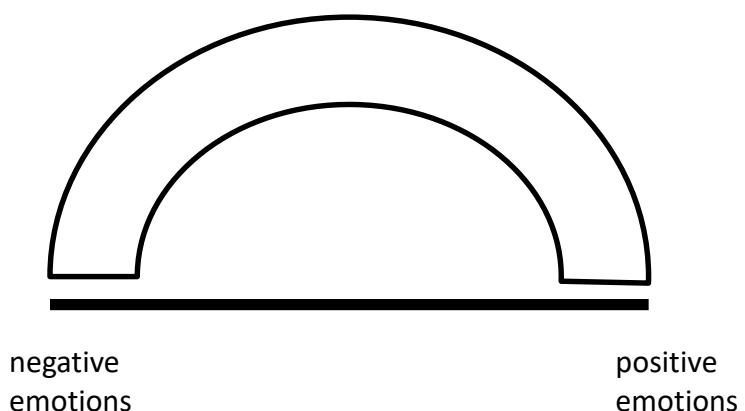
#### STEP 3: Annotate

- Highlight the three most important and interesting images in the poem
- Highlight any other interesting words in the poem
- Does the tone shift at any point?
- How does the poem begin and end?
- How does the poem utilise form?
- I like / I am puzzled by / I am interested in

In both, '*In Oak Terrace*' and '*Those Winter Sundays*' the speakers describe feelings created by memories.

What are the similarities and/or differences between the methods the poets use to present these feelings? [8 marks]

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Both create a tone of sadness.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The cause of this sadness is different – in IOT the speaker describes how the lady feels sorrow from painful memories. In TWS, the speaker's sadness comes from a tone of longing for his father.</li></ul>



**STEP 1: Read**

- Who is speaking?
- Who is being addressed?
- What is the speaker talking about?
- Where is the poem set?

**STEP 2: Read**

- What is the poem about thematically?
- What attitude does the poem express towards this idea?
- What idea is the poem about? Does it seem happy, sad or angry about this idea?

**STEP 3: Annotate**

- Highlight the three most important and interesting images in the poem
- Highlight any other interesting words in the poem
- Does the tone shift at any point?
- How does the poem begin and end?
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**The Mower**  
by Philip Larkin

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found  
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,  
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.  
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world  
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.  
The first day after a death, the new absence  
Is always the same; we should be careful  
  
Of each other, we should be kind  
While there is still time.

Use the space below to create a detailed plan in response to the question:

**In '*The Mower*', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings of guilt? [24 marks]**

**STEP 1: Read**

[COMPLETE STEP 1 FROM  
MEMORY]

**Nettles**  
by Vernon Scannell

My son aged three fell in the nettle bed.  
'Bed' seemed a curious name for those green spears,  
That regiment of spite behind the shed:  
It was no place for rest. With sobs and tears  
The boy came seeking comfort and I saw  
White blisters beaded on his tender skin.  
We soothed him till his pain was not so raw.  
At last he offered us a watery grin,  
And then I took my billhook, honed the blade  
And went outside and slashed in fury with it  
Till not a nettle in that fierce parade  
Stood upright any more. And then I lit  
A funeral pyre to burn the fallen dead,  
But in two weeks the busy sun and rain  
Had called up tall recruits behind the shed:  
My son would often feel sharp wounds again.

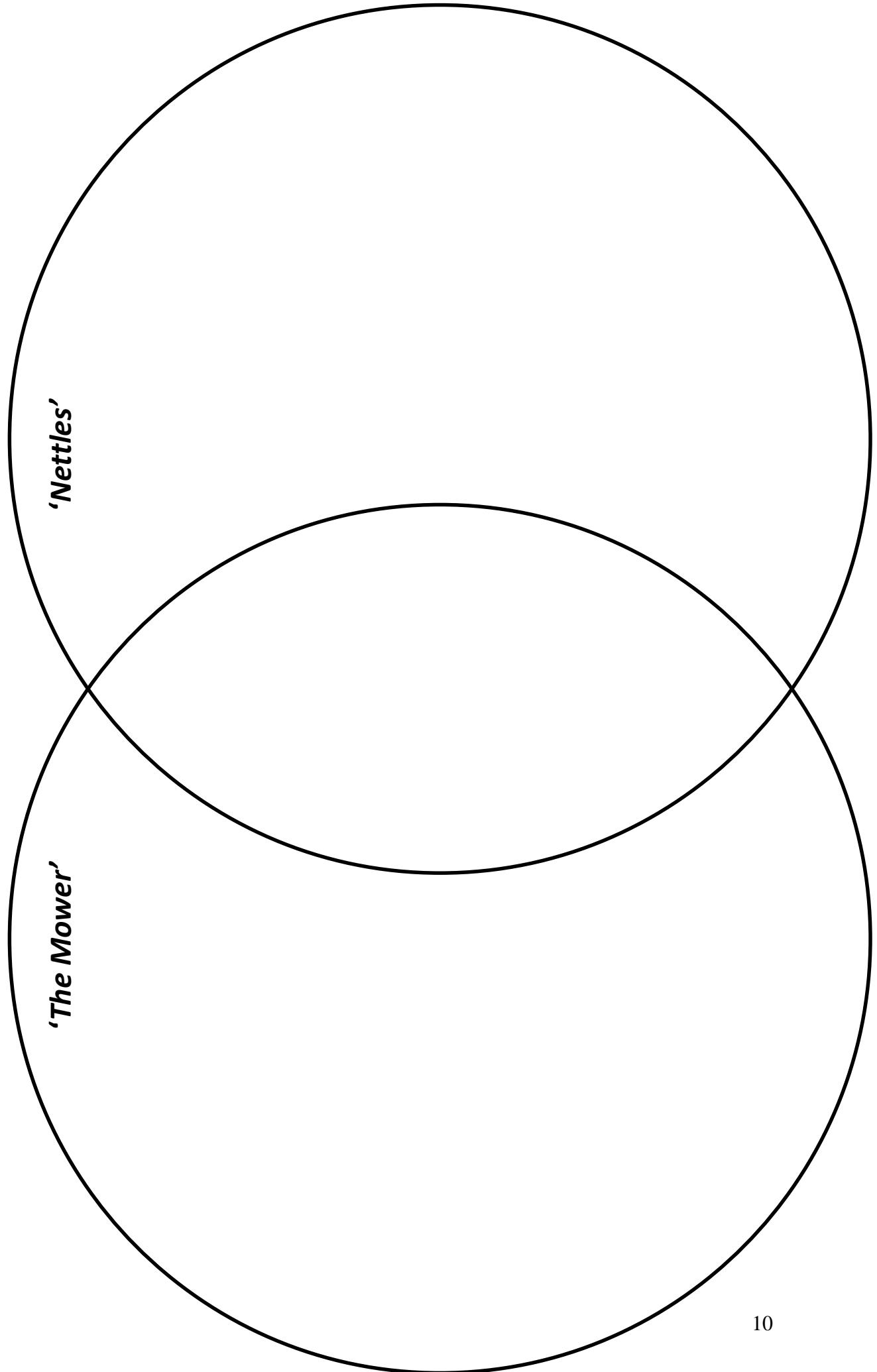
**STEP 2: Read**

- What is the poem about thematically?
- What attitude does the poem express towards this idea?
- What idea is the poem about? Does it seem happy, sad or angry about this idea?

**STEP 3: Annotate**

- Highlight the three most important and interesting images in the poem
- Highlight any other interesting words in the poem
- Does the tone shift at any point?
- How does the poem begin and end?
- How does the poem utilise form?
- I like / I am puzzled by / I am interested in

In both '*The Mower*' and '*Nettles*', compare how the writers explore the relationship between humans and nature. [8 marks]



Quotation: “ _____”	Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us: _____ _____	Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas: _____ _____
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**Quotation:**  
“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



<p><b>Quotation:</b> “</p>	<p>Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas:</b></p> <hr/> <hr/>
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**Quotation:** “**above the world’s junkshop**”

Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us:

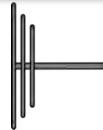
The world below the speaker is full of junk and rubbish and needs cleaning up.

**Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas:**

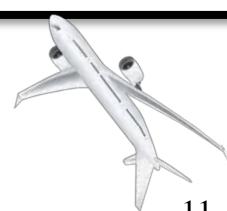
By describing the world below them as a ‘junkshop’, the speaker gives off connotations of unwanted rubbish that is left lying around, unused and unnecessary.



<b>Quotation:</b> “ _____ ”	<p>Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas:</p> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p><b>Quotation:</b></p> <p>“ _____ ”</p>	<p>Explain what you think the speaker is conveying to us:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Evaluate how this quotation helps to convey these ideas:</p> <hr/> <hr/>
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**Futurama**  
**by Simon Armitage**

I crawl out onto the rooftop  
above the world's junkshop,  
lean against the warm chimney  
and eyeball the city.

The vibe is ... let's say *ethereal*,  
rows of TV aerials  
spelling out HEAVEN,  
spelling out ARMAGEDDON.

It's T minus zero  
of the Petroleum Era –

all my neighbours  
are burning tomorrow's newspapers  
in their back-gardens,  
getting their alibis sharpened.

As the hours evaporate  
I say to my spirit

I can't really pilot  
this smouldering twilight

over the scars and crevasses,  
but I'll put on my best sunglasses

and steer the cockpit of morning  
into the oncoming.

## Still I Rise

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**In '*Still I Rise*', how does Maya Angelou present ideas about identity?**

**[24 marks]**

**Revision Section:**

The next few pages have copies of other unseen poems for you to use for revision.

You can:

- Close read them without the support prompt.
- Answer the 24 mark questions.
- Answer the 8 mark questions.
- Create detailed plans for 24 mark questions.
- Create a Venn diagram for 8 mark questions.
- Read the poem 'Island Man' and then use the mark scheme to give it a mark out of 24.

**I, Too**  
by Langston Hughes

**STEP 1: Read**

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

**STEP 2: Read**

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
“Eat in the kitchen,”  
Then.

**STEP 3: Annotate**

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

**In both '*Still I Rise*' and '*I, Too*', how do the poets present their feelings about equality?**

**What are the similarities and/or differences between the methods the poets use to present these feelings? [8 marks]**

## Still Life

By Thom Gunn

I shall not soon forget  
The greyish-yellow skin  
To which the face had set:  
Lids tight: nothing of his,  
No tremor from within,  
Played on the surfaces.  
He still found breath, and yet  
It was an obscure knack.  
I shall not soon forget  
The angle of his head,  
Arrested and reared back  
On the crisp field of bed,  
Back from what he could neither  
Accept, as one opposed,  
Nor, as a life-long breather,  
Consentingly let go,  
The tube his mouth enclosed  
In an astonished O.

STEP 1: Read

STEP 2: Read

STEP 3: Annotate

In '*Still Life*', how does the poet present the speaker's grief?

[24 marks]

**Dad**  
**by Elaine Feinstein**

**Reading an Unseen  
Poetry**

**STEP 1: Read**

Your old hat hurts me, and those black  
    fat raisins you liked to press into  
my palm from your soft heavy hand:  
    I see you staggering back up the path  
with sacks of potatoes from some local farm,  
    fresh eggs, flowers. Every day I grieve

for your great heart broken and you gone.

    You loved to watch the trees. This year  
you did not see their Spring.

    The sky was freezing over the fen  
as on that somewhere secretly appointed day  
    you beached: cold, white-faced, shivering.

What happened, old bull, my loyal  
    hoarse-voiced warrior? The hammer  
blow that stopped you in your track  
    and brought you to a hospital monitor  
could not destroy your courage  
    to the end you were  
uncowed and unconcerned with pleasing anyone.

I think of you now as once again safely  
    at my mother's side, the earth as  
chosen as a bed, and feel most sorrow for  
    all that was gentle in  
my childhood buried there  
    already forfeit, now forever lost.

**STEP 2: Read**

**STEP 3: Annotate**

**In 'Still Life' and 'Dad', how do the poets present the speaker's memories of a loved one.**

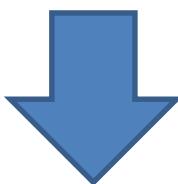
**What are the similarities and/or differences between the methods the poets use to present these feelings?**

**[8 marks]**

## The 24 Mark Question: Essay Structure

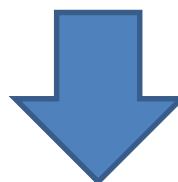
### **Introduction: Thematically speaking...**

This should be a single sentence that refers directly to the precise terms of the question and expresses what the poem's driving theme is as related to that question.



### **Main Body: Language Analysis**

Move through the poem chronologically discussing key images. You should aim for at least three images, saying multiple things about each one. You may also discuss specific words to supplement what you say about the image. You should, when appropriate, discuss form to reinforce something you've said about language.



### **Conclusion**

Step back from the poem and discuss the overall message that the poem is trying to communicate.

### The 8 Mark Question

- You need to compare and contrast both texts throughout and discuss the use of methods in each and their effects
- In order to hit the top marks you need to discuss form, language, and structure
- Use the following structure:
  - **Paragraph One:** The two poems include a similar / different use of language. For example... The effect of this is...
  - **Paragraph Two:** The two poems include a similar / different use of structure and form. For example... The effect of this is...
- Discuss language the most, then structure, and finally discuss form the least
- Do not include a conclusion
- Make sure you are exploratory
- Use subject terminology

**Island Man**  
**by Grace Nicholls**

Morning  
And the Island man wakes up  
To the sound of blue surf  
In his head  
The steady breaking and wombing

Wild seabirds  
And fisherman pulling out to sea  
The sun surfacing defiantly

From the east  
Of his small emerald island  
He always comes back groggily groggily

Comes back to sands  
Of a grey metallic soar  
To surge of wheels  
To dull North Circular roar

Muffling muffling  
His crumpled pillow waves  
Island man heaves himself

Another London day

**How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about home? (24)**

## Model Response

Thematically speaking, the poet presents the speaker's feelings about his home as a vehicle through which to explore the way in which it shapes one's identity and its deep emotional significance. The poem begins with a cluster of positive images including 'sound of blue surf'. The adjective 'blue' is typically associated with something very peaceful and tranquil, which is phonetically reinforced by the soft 's' sound. This is further reinforced by the 'surf' being described as 'wombing'. This is reminiscent of a mother and baby and is richly suggestive of the safety that the speaker feels when thinking about the 'blue surf'. However, during this idyllic description the poet concedes that it is 'in his head'. This perhaps indicates that the speaker is not actually experiencing any of the described things, but rather he is dreaming it. This introduces a foreboding tone as it perhaps suggests that the speaker is separated from his home and not where he would like to be.

The poet continues to describe the speaker's home in a highly positive light. For instance, the island is described as being home to 'wild seabirds'. Birds are typically associated with freedom and being unrestricted, which is augmented by Nicholls' adjective 'wild'. The fact that they are specifically 'seabirds' serves to further reinforce this as one imagines a bird soaring over the sea with complete liberty, again evoking a serene and peaceful setting. This is heightened by Nicholls' use of free verse, which typographically mimics the sense of freedom being evoked. The idyllic tone is further compounded by the lexical choice of 'emerald'. In terms of colour, this is richly suggestive of a deep and vibrant green, with green typically being associated with fertility and new life. Furthermore, an 'emerald' is also a highly valuable jewel indicating how beautiful and valuable the island is to the speaker. At the end of this stanza, Nicholls continues the same structural pattern established with 'in his head' by explaining that the speaker 'always comes back groggily groggily'. Here, Nicholls establishes a sense that the speaker is being unwillingly wrenched from his Edenic home, helping to explain its importance for the speaker and the distress caused when no longer there.

This suggestion of the speaker's distress is then made more explicit when Nicholls describes the 'sounds of a grey metallic soar' and 'surge of wheels' of the 'dull North circular roar'. Immediately one notices the juxtaposition between the vibrant colours of the first stanzas and the monotonous and 'dull' 'grey'. This highlights how inferior the city is

compared to the speaker's island and the way in which it causes the speaker to feel depressed and melancholic. Similarly, Nicholls' aggressive verb 'surge' further indicates the unexpected and almost violent way in which the reality of the speaker's life intrudes upon his dreams of home. This is compounded by the equally pejorative verb 'heaves', which suggests the speaker finds each day away from his island an intense struggle. The word implies an action that is very physical and effortful, underlining the speaker's internal conflict as he is forced to tear himself from his dream. The poem concludes by revealing the source of the speaker's dissatisfaction: rather than enjoying the 'blue surf' he must confront 'another London day'. One can almost hear the speaker sighing with deep regret as he swings his feet out of bed, forced to come to terms with 'another' day away from his home and the inevitable pain this will cause. The typographical break in the stanza functions as a physical manifestation of the way in which the speaker is separated from his home and the distance he must endure.

Fundamentally, Nicholls highlights the way in which one's identity is shaped by one's home and the way in which separation from this can cause pain. The poem is a profound meditation on the necessity of feeling as though you belong and the emotional damage that is done when one is stripped of such belonging.

**Home (linked to Island Man)**

Home is pictures of memories on the wall.  
Home is sleeping in my own bed.  
Home is waking up to the smell of mom's cooking.  
Home is sharing the holidays with family.  
Home is playing the piano in the living room.  
Home is a warm place to be.  
Home is sweet.  
Home is the place for me.  
Home is filled with love.  
Home is blessed from heaven above.  
Home is where my heart is.  
Home has a strong foundation.  
It can weather any storm.  
Home is where I belong.  
When I go away,  
I know I can come back to stay.  
Home is a beautiful place.

Jennifer Burns

**Both Island Man and Home explore the important role that homes play in people's lives. What are similarities and / or differences in the ways the poets explore feelings about home. (8)**

**Both Island Man and Home explore the important role that homes play in people's lives. What are similarities and / or differences in the ways the poets explore feelings about home. (8)**

**Model Response**

When considering how the two poets explore the importance of home, they both make effective use of language. Nicholls begins her poem with a cluster of highly positive images such as evoking the 'blue surf' and the fact that the waves are 'wombing'. This is effective because 'blue' is typically associated with serenity and peace and the connotations of 'womb' are suggestive of maternal protection and safety. Later in the poem, Nicholls also describes the island as being 'emerald' which, like 'blue', is a typically positive colour and is also associated with a precious and valuable jewel. Similarly, Burns describes home in using equally positive imagery. She says it is 'a warm place to be' and 'blessed from heaven above'. The lexical choice of 'warm', like 'wombing', suggests a place of comfort and security whilst the religious imagery in 'blessed from heaven above' highlights just how important home is to Burns in much the same way Nicholls underlines its value through the reference to a jewel.

Both poets also evoke the importance of home through an effective use of structure and form. Both use free verse throughout which helps to cement the freedom and liberty they associate with home, that it is a place without restraint and where one can be oneself. However, Nicholls employs a tonal shift midway through the poem to highlight the pain caused by not being at home whilst Burns maintains a deeply positive tone throughout. This is compounded by Burns' use of anaphora through the repeated use of 'home', suggesting it is always on the speaker's mind and plays a huge role in her life. In contrast, Nicholls concludes with a single line signalling the speaker is away from home and how unwelcome this separation.

### **Storm on the Island**

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,  
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.  
This wizened earth has never troubled us  
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks  
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees

Which might prove company when it blows full  
Blast: you know what I mean - leaves and branches  
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale  
So that you listen to the thing you fear  
Forgetting that it pummels your house too.

But there are no trees, no natural shelter.  
You might think that the sea is company,  
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs  
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits  
The very windows, spits like a tame cat

Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives  
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,  
We are bombarded with the empty air.  
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

### **Storm in The Black Forest (linked to Storm on the Island)**

Now it is almost night, from the bronzey soft sky  
jugfull after jugfull of pure white liquid fire, bright white  
tipples over and spills down,  
and is gone  
and gold-bronze flutters beat through the thick upper air.

And as the electric liquid pours out, sometimes  
a still brighter white snake wriggles among it, spilled  
and tumbling wriggling down the sky :  
and then the heavens cackle with uncouth sounds.

And the rain won't come, the rain refuses to come!

This is the electricity that man is supposed to have mastered  
chained, subjugated to his own use!  
supposed to!

**In both 'Storm on the Island' and 'Storm in the Black Forest' the speakers describe feelings about storms. What are the similarities of differences between the ways the poets have presented these feelings?**

## Writing about Poetry – Support Sheet

<p><b>To describe what a poet's intentions are:</b></p> <p>Portrays</p> <p>Depicts</p> <p>Illustrates</p> <p>Expose</p> <p>Presents</p> <p>Paints a picture of</p> <p>Represents</p> <p>Demonstrates</p> <p>Embodies - (v) Represent or express in tangible form</p>	<p>To demonstrate this idea</p> <p><b>For analysing:</b></p> <p>This suggests...</p> <p>This links to...</p> <p>Alternatively, it might...</p> <p>This indicates...</p> <p>We can argue that...</p> <p>The audience will...</p> <p>This demonstrates...</p> <p>This reveals...</p>
<p><b>To give an example or quotation:</b></p> <p>For example</p> <p>For instance</p> <p>In particular</p> <p>Particularly - Specifically or especially distinguished from others</p> <p>Specifically</p> <p>To illustrate my point</p>	<p><b>For comparison:</b></p> <p>If you compare this to {POEM NAME}...</p> <p>Similarly, [AUTHOR] presents [POWER/CONFLICT]...</p> <p>In contrast, [AUTHOR]...</p> <p>Through the use of [TECHNIQUE], [AUTHOR] presents power... however, ...</p>

### Verbs for analysis:

advises    affects    argues    builds    clarifies    confirms    connotes  
                  criticises    conveys    denotes    depicts    describes  
determines    demonstrates    displays    encourages    emphasises  
                  establishes    explores    foreshadows    foretells    highlights  
hints    illustrates    impacts    implies    manifests  
                  narrates    persuades    portrays    presents    refers  
relates    represents    reveals    shows    signifies  
                  symbolises    suggests    supports    typifies    underlines