Homework 1:

**You Being Born**

*Brian Jones*

I saw you born.

It was remarkable.

You shot out from between your mother’s legs

like a rugby ball from a scrum

and the stocky Geordie midwife caught you neatly

and cried ‘Whoops! She’s come!’

You had a wrinkled jammy head

and spasmy legs like a portly frog’s.

From your belly button a white root waved

that had fed you all the months you’d grown

and ripened in your mother’s womb.

And let me tell you – I’m ashamed –

I forgot your mother completely – she had been

those things to me that one day you’ll discover

in someone else, and think ‘God, this is it!’

– My sweetheart, my warm dear, my red hot lover –

But for those moments, as the doctor

shoved cotton wool up your flat nose

and swabbed your eyes and cleaned your bum

I forgot completely all my life and love

and watched you like a pool of growing light

and whispered to myself ‘She’s come! She’s come!’

Answer these questions in detail

1. What picture do you get of the narrator as you read the poem? Think about what he is like and what are his feelings.

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1. What emotions is he experiencing? How do you know?

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1. What effect do the following similes and metaphors have on the reader/listener? Pay particular attention to the words that have been underlined:
   1. “You shot out from between your mother’s legs

like a rugby ball from a scrum”

*This makes the reader think…………………………………………………………………………….*

*…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………*

* 1. “You had a wrinkled jammy head

and spasmy legs like a portly frog’s”

*This makes the reader think…………………………………………………………………………….*

*…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………*

1. The first two lines are very short. There is a caesura (pause) in the opening lines of the poem? Why do you think the writer made the first two lines so short?

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1. What is the poet “ashamed” of in this poem? Why do you think this is?

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Week 2

**Brendon Gallacher**

*Jackie Kay*

He was seven and I was six, my Brendon Gallacher.

He was Irish and I was Scottish, my Brendon Gallacher.

His father was in prison; he was a cat burglar.

My father was a communist party full-time worker.

He had six brothers and I had one, my Brendon Gallacher.

He would hold my hand and take me by the river

Where we’d talk all about his family being poor.

He’d get his mum out of Glasgow when he got older.

A wee holiday someplace nice. Some place far.

I’d tell my mum about Brendon Gallacher.

How his mum drank and his daddy was a cat burglar.

And she’d say, ‘why not have him round for dinner?’

No, no, I’d say he’s got big holes in his trousers.

I like meeting him by the burn in the open air.

Then one day after we’d been friends for two years,

One day when it was pouring and I was indoors,

My mum says to me, ‘I was talking to Mrs Moir

Who lives next door to your Brendon Gallacher

Didn’t you say his address was 24 Novar?

She says here are No Gallachers at 24 Novar

There never have been any Gallachers next door.’

And he died then, my Brendon Gallacher,

Flat out on my bedroom floor, his spiky hair,

His impish grin, his funny flapping ear.

Oh Brendon. Oh my Brendon Gallacher.

Key words:

Wee – Scottish word for ‘small’

Cat burglar – a flexible and gymnastic thief who can access buildings by climbing through windows

Novar – a Scottish street name

Answer these questions in detail

1. What does Brendon look like?

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1. What is Brendon’s home life like?

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1. List the words/phrases are repeated through the poem?

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1. How is Brendon presented as ‘real’ in the poem?

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1. Why do you think he is presented this way?

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1. Why do you think the narrator wanted Brendon as a friend?

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1. What is the poet using this character for – do they represent something about human nature in general?

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Week 3

**The Falling Leaves**

*Margaret Postgate Cole*

Today, as I rode by,

I saw the brown leaves dropping from their tree

In a still afternoon,

When no wind whirled them whistling to the sky,

But thickly, silently,

They fell, like snowflakes wiping out the noon;

And wandered slowly thence

For thinking of a gallant multitude

Which now all withering lay,

Slain by no wind of age or pestilence,

But in their beauty strewed

Like snowflakes falling on the Flemish clay

Answer these questions in detail:

1. This poem was written in November 1915. What significant event was happening in Europe at this time?

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1. What sort of afternoon is it? Do you think this is important for setting the mood of the poem?

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1. Describe how the poet conveys the leaves falling from the tree in your own words. Do not use the same words the poet has used.

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1. Why are the leaves falling “silently” and what does this seem to indicate?

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1. What effect does the line “like snowflakes wiping out the noon” have on the reader? Think what “noon” (midday) should be like.

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1. What does “gallant” mean? ……………………………………………………………………………….......

1. What does “multitude” mean? ………………………………………………………………………………..
2. What does “slain” mean? ………………………………………………………………………………………..
3. Flemish means the area around Belgium. Much of the fighting the First World War occurred in this area. What message do you think the poet is trying to convey in this poem?

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1. Do you think this is a pro-war or anti-war poem? Give reasons for your answer.

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Week 4

**What has happened to Lulu?**

*Charles Causley*

What has happened to Lulu, mother?

What has happened to Lu?

There's nothing in her bed but an old rag-doll

And by its side a shoe.

Why is her window wide, mother,

The curtain flapping free,

And only a circle on the dusty shelf

Where her money-box used to be?

Why do you turn your head, mother,

And why do tear drops fall?

And why do you crumple that note on the fire

And say it is nothing at all?

I woke to voices late last night,

I heard an engine roar.

Why do you tell me the things I heard

Were a dream and nothing more?

I heard somebody cry, mother,

In anger or in pain,

But now I ask you why, mother,

You say it was a gust of rain.

Why do you wander about as though

You don't know what to do?

What has happened to Lulu, mother?

What has happened to Lu?

1. What do you think has happened to Lulu?

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1. Find evidence that Lulu has left in a hurry.

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1. Whose point of view is the poem told from?

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1. What evidence is there to support this?

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1. Why may the poet have written it from this point of view? How does it make you feel?

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1. What does the repetition of rhetorical questions suggest to the reader?

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1. Who do you feel most sympathy for, Lulu or the narrator? Why?

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Week 5

**The Mower**

***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.

1. Describe, in your own words, what happened in this poem.

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1. The death of the hedgehog is only briefly described as being “jammes up against the blades, Killed.” Why do you think the poet does not describe this in detail?

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1. In addition to a lack of detailed description of the death of the hedgehog, can you find any other way the poet makes this tragic event seem less upsetting? (Hint: try reading stanza 1 out loud.

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1. How does the poet make the word “Killed” stand out? Why do you think he does this?

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1. The poet describes seeing the creature before. What effect does this have on the reader?

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1. What do you think the message of the poem is? Read the last three lines carefully.

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Week 6

**Woman Work**

*Maya Angelou*

I've got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
Then the chicken to fry  
The baby to dry  
I got company to feed  
The garden to weed  
I've got shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The can to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick.  
  
Shine on me, sunshine  
Rain on me, rain  
Fall softly, dewdrops  
And cool my brow again.  
  
Storm, blow me from here  
With your fiercest wind  
Let me float across the sky  
'Til I can rest again.  
  
Fall gently, snowflakes  
Cover me with white  
Cold icy kisses and  
Let me rest tonight.  
  
Sun, rain, curving sky  
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone  
Star shine, moon glow  
You're all that I can call my own.

1. What do you notice about the lines and the punctuation in the first stanza. How does it compare to the other stanzas?

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1. What does this stanza suggest about the work of women?

*The poet suggests that the work performed by women is ………………………………… This is shown by …………………………………………………………………………………… The use of ………………………………………………………………………………………… shows that the demands placed on women are ……………………………………………………….. The reader may feel …………………………………………. towards the women because it seems ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….*

1. Compare the tone of the first stanza to the other four stanzas. How are the different?

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1. Complete the writing frame, adding the missing words or deleting the incorrect option:

*The poet cleverly* contrasts / matches *the first stanza from the other stanzas. The effect on the reader is that they will see that the life of the woman is …………………………………………… and that she feels that ……………………………………. The use of the word “………………………………..” in the opening stanza suggests that ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………. The poet uses ………………………………………..(name a technique) because it shows ……………………………………………. and allows the reader to imagine …………… ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………… This changes in the final four stanzas. The tone is ………………………… and the imagery describes a ……………………………………….. scene. An example of this is “…………………………………………………………………………… ………………….” This shows ……………….. and reveals………………………………… …………………………………………………………………………………………. The use of the word ‘…………………………….’ suggests………………………….............. and ……………………………………………………………………………………… The poet is trying to show………………………………..……..and presents the idea of ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………..*

Week 7

**Leisure**

*W.H. Davies*

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare?—

No time to stand beneath the boughs,  
And stare as long as sheep and cows:

No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:

No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance:

No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began?

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

1. What attitude towards everyday life does the narrator of this poem display? What clues tell you this?

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1. What are the narrator’s ambitions?

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1. List four pleasant activities that the narrator feels he has not enough time for

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3 …………………………………………………………… 4……………………………………………………………………

1. Why do you think he has chosen these activities?

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1. The poem has a very simple structure – seven two line stanzas, in rhyming couplets. Why do you think the poet has used such a simple structure?

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Complete the table:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Writer’s technique | Example | Effect on the reader |
| Rhetorical question | What is this life……..? |  |
|  | No time to stand ……. No time to stand ……. No time to see… | Reinforces the frantic pace of life and suggests that the narrator never has time to pause or stop. |
| Personification |  |  |
|  | “Stream full of stars” |  |
| Simile |  |  |