Power and Conflict Poetry—Power of Nature

Revision Booklet

Student name:

Teacher name:

Form tutor:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Exposure—*Wilfred Owen*

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us ...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces -
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, -
We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands. puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

Task One

Select two or three quotations which really effectively portray nature as a violent, bullying force. Analyse them.

Task Two

Owen uses a consistent and predictable 5-line stanza structure, with consistent half-rhyming (ABBAC). He also has the final line of each stanza 'cut short' compared to the others. What might he be trying to say with his structural choices?

Task Three

Why did Owen write this poem? What is he trying to convey to the people back home about trench warfare?

"*The coldest winter was 1916-17. The winter was so cold that I felt like crying. I didn't actually cry but I'd never felt like it before, not even under shell fire."* **NCO Clifford Lane**

Extract from 'The Prelude' - *William Wordsworth*

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, –
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

Task One

The tone of the poem changes as its story develops. Identify and explain the tone at the beginning *and* at the end, and try to identify the volta (turning point).

Task Two

Identify and analyse language which stresses Wordsworth's awe for the power of the natural world.

Task Three: Find two/three lines where the poet has used punctuation effectively, and analyse how and why he's done it.

Task Four

Wordsworth believed that his experiences of nature changed the way he saw himself, others, and the world. His advice to others was "*to let nature be your teacher*."

What does Wordsworth believe nature has to teach us, based on the extract from 'The Prelude'?

Storm on the Island *SEAMUS HEANEY*

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 can 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 by the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

Task One

Track the poem's references to natural materials (rock...slate etc.) and explain how the poet uses them to convey an idea of strength.

Task Two

Identify the military language at the poem's end and analyse how Heaney is presenting nature.

Task Three

"The sea… spits like a tame cat turned savage."

Analyse this simile in as much detail as you can. Explore individual words, the simile as a whole, the sounds of the words, and anything else you can think of.

Task Four

Heaney, an Irish poet, describes nature in his poem 'Storm On The Island'. What do you think he believes nature has done to his home country?

"When anyone asks me about the Irish character, I say look at the trees: maimed, stark and misshapen, but ferociously tenacious." Edna O'Brien—Irish writer

Kamikaze—*Beatrice Garland*

Her father embarked at sunrise
with a flask of water, a samurai sword
in the cockpit, a shaven head
full of powerful incantations
and enough fuel for a one-way
journey into history

but half way there, she thought,
recounting it later to her children,
he must have looked far down
at the little fishing boats
strung out like bunting
on a green-blue translucent sea

and beneath them, arcing in swathes
like a huge flag waved first one way
then the other in a figure of eight,
the dark shoals of fishes
flashing silver as their bellies
swivelled towards the sun

and remembered how he
and his brothers waiting on the shore
built cairns of pearl-grey pebbles
to see whose withstood longest
the turbulent inrush of breakers
bringing their father's boat safe

- *yes, grandfather's boat* – safe
to the shore, salt-sodden, awash
with cloud-marked mackerel,
black crabs, feathery prawns,
the loose silver of whitebait and once
a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous.

And though he came back
my mother never spoke again
in his presence, nor did she meet his eyes
and the neighbours too, they treated him
as though he no longer existed,
only we children still chattered and laughed

till gradually we too learned
to be silent, to live as though
he had never returned, that this
was no longer the father we loved.
And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered
which had been the better way to die.

Task One

The poem tells the story of a kamikaze pilot's fateful decision not to carry out his mission. Track and explain how Beatrice uses nature references to reflect the pilot's mood/attitude.

Task Two

Analyse the use of punctuation for effect in the poem.

Task Three

Why is the poem told from the perspective of the pilot's daughter rather than the pilot himself?

Task Four

The poem could be said to be about the natural world shaping a man's decisions. To what extent do you think this is true?

"One of the characteristics of Japanese culture is often said to be the close and harmonious relationship between man and nature. Accordingly, the Japanese attitude towards nature is described as 'man in harmony with nature'. *Yuriko Saito*

Comparison Essay Practice

Select two of the poems from this booklet.

Compare how each poet presents their views on the power of nature. Try to include all of the notes from this booklet, as well as anything else you can think of/remember for both poems.