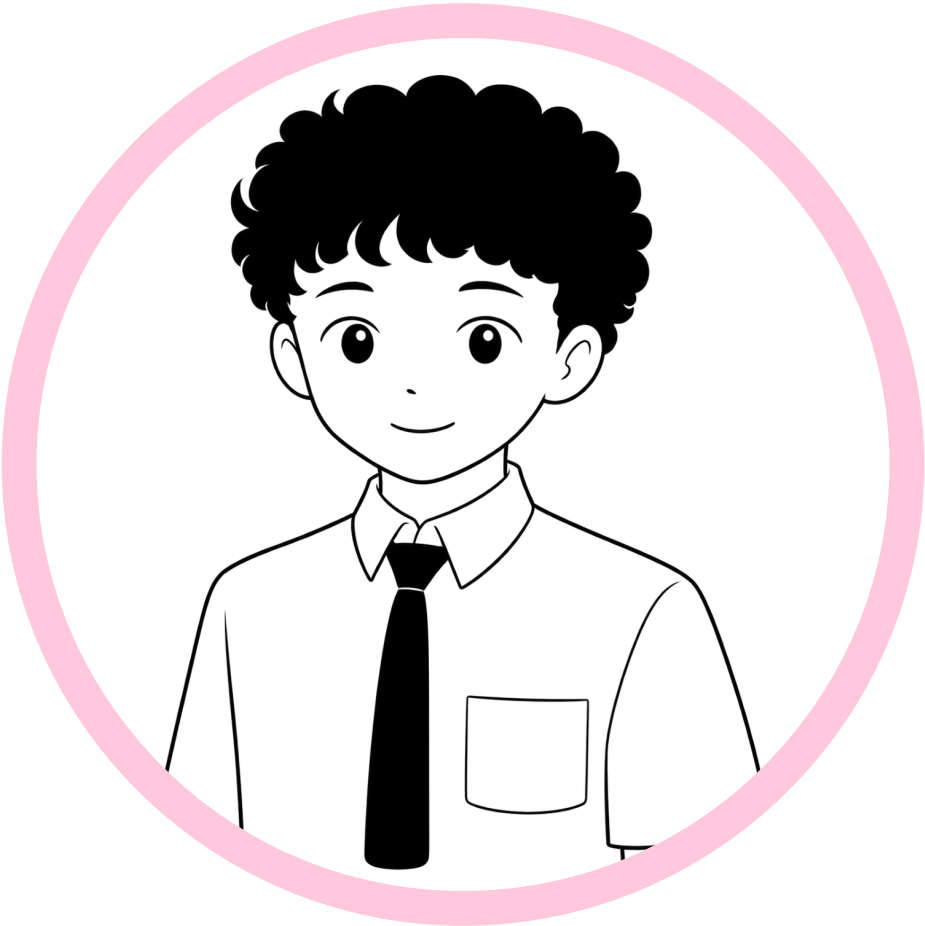
OXFORDAQA INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE · 9275

ENGLISH



PRACTICE QUESTIONS

UNSEEN POETRY: 16 PRACTICE QUESTIONS

SCORE	PERCENTAGE
/	%

STEMUP

Unseen Poetry 1

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The Tide Table

At six the harbour is a held breath,
the water pulled back like a sheet from a bed
to show the mud's grey ribs, the shopping trolley,
the rope that nobody owns.
I read the printed numbers on the kitchen wall,
high water, low water, the small arithmetic
of someone else's ocean, and I still feel
that it keeps a promise I cannot.
By noon the sea has remembered itself.
It slaps the steps and spreads its bright coins
and the gulls argue over the change.
I eat my sandwich like a customer.
At dusk it is a wall of slate, then a rumour,
then only a sound that breathes beside my bed
in and out, in and out, patient as a nurse,
and I am grateful, and I am afraid.

How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about the sea in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 2

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Harbour Wall

Each morning she walks out along the wall
with tea that cools before she lifts the lid,
and counts the boats, though none of them is all
she hopes for. One is missing, as it did
the winter that the weather took the bay
and handed back its pieces, one by one.
She keeps his boots beside the door. They stay
as stiff as promises. The tide has run
its patient errands under her for years,
and she has learned its language, more or less:
the sullen hush, the flood that swells like tears,
the slack, which is the closest thing to peace.
Today a child beside her drops a line
and asks her what she watches for. She smiles
and says, "The weather." All the water's shine
goes out and out, for miles and miles.

How does the poet present the woman's grief and routine in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 3

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Midwinter

The morning arrives already tired.
Frost has stitched the washing line to the sky
and the allotment lies under its white lid,
every cabbage a clenched fist.
My father's breath goes up in small flags.
We do not speak; speech would only freeze
and fall, a litter of words on the path.
Even the robin is a red full stop.
Indoors, the kettle begins its slow argument
and the windows sweat, as if the house
were trying to remember being warm.
I press my palm to the glass and leave
a hand-shaped absence, a brief clearing,
then watch the cold come back to claim it,
patient as a creditor.

How does the poet present the presentation of winter in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 4

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

August

The afternoon is thick with lazy bees,
the lawn a yellow fever in the heat;
the children shriek beneath the sprinkler's seas
and tar goes soft as toffee in the street.
We lie like sunk things on a bed of grass
and watch the clouds forget themselves and drift,
while ice cream runs in rivers down the glass
and every minute seems a given gift.
Yet something in the light has turned its face.
The swifts are practising their long goodbyes,
and in the hedge, a single leaf, in place,
has rusted: a small flag of slow surprise.
So let us drink the gold while it is poured,
and spend the light as though it could be stored.

How does the poet present the presentation of summer in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 5

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The House on Marsh Lane

I go back in dreams, never in daylight.
The front door sticks in the same place
and the hall smells of coats and boiled greens.
My mother's radio mutters in the kitchen,
a weather forecast for a country that no longer exists.
I climb the stairs on all fours, the way I did,
and every step remembers me, creaking
its small accusation.
The bedroom is smaller. That is the cruelty of it:
the wallpaper rockets I thought were enormous
have shrunk to the size of stamps,
and the window, once a whole sky,
is a postcard of someone else's garden.
Still, I stand there until the dream wobbles,
touch the radiator, warm as a sleeping animal,
and for a moment I am not the one
who left, but the one who is still
on the landing, listening for the key.

How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about the past in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 6

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Her Hands

Her hands were maps of somewhere I had not been:
the river-lines of veins, the rough brown country
of knuckles, a scar from a kettle in nineteen sixty.
They kneaded bread as if the dough owed them money.
They pinned my collar straight before every wedding,
every funeral, and sometimes, without warning,
they cupped my face and did not say a word.
Now the house is quiet, and the bread tins rust.
I catch myself in the bakery, tearing a loaf,
and see them, the same square thumbs, the same impatience,
working in my own hands as though she had hidden
a little of herself in me for safekeeping.
I do not own her recipes. I have the way
she pressed and turned, and turned and pressed,
the way a heartbeat is a kind of kneading,
and the way I am, in this small gesture, held.

How does the poet present the speaker's relationship with the grandmother in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 7

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The City After Midnight

The streets are rinsed in orange, sodium-sweet.
A fox crosses the zebra crossing like a clerk,
unhurried, with permission.
Above the kebab shop, one light is on.
Someone is awake and failing to sleep,
a small lit window in a cliff of dark.
The night bus sighs at the stop and opens
its aquarium of faces, blue and tired,
each one lit from below by a phone.
Nobody speaks. The city hums
like a fridge in an empty flat,
and I walk through it, a thread through cloth,
neither coming nor going, only
passing, the way water passes
through the cracked and patient pipes,
carrying everything and keeping none.

How does the poet present the atmosphere of the city at night in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 8

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Dawn on the Farm

The cockerel tears the dark along its seam
and light spills in, thin gold across the yard;
the cows, still half-asleep inside a dream,
lean into morning, breathing slow and hard.
My uncle's boots go ringing on the stone.
He hums a tune that never starts or ends,
and every gate he opens, hinge and bone,
replies to him as one old friend to friends.
The fields lie folded under silver mist,
the dew a quiet fortune on the wire.
Here nothing waits to be improved or missed;
the day begins as work, and ends as fire.
And I, who thought the world was only speed,
stand with a bucket, warm and strangely still,
and learn that peace is not a thing we need
to find, but do. The kettle's calling, shrill.

How does the poet present the presentation of rural life in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 9

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Learner Driver

My father grips the seat as if it might
be lifted from beneath him by the wind.
I check the mirror, signal, and, in spite
of nerves, release the clutch. We have not sinned
against a single kerb. He breathes. The street
is ours, the drizzle ticking on the glass.
Eight years ago he held my bike's wet seat
and ran behind me, panting, on the grass,
and then, without announcing it, let go.
I did not know. I thought that he was there.
Now here he sits, afraid of what I know:
that he is learning, as I steer, to spare
his hands, to trust the road, to let me be
the one who drives us somewhere he can't see.

How does the poet present the relationship between father and child in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 10

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Clearing the Room

Don't apologise. I've been meaning to clear this room anyway.
It's only boxes, and your old guitar,
and that rug you hated, the one with the ducks.
I'll put the sheets on later. Don't look like that.
You think I haven't practised this? I have.
I stood in your doorway on Tuesday and said
the whole speech to the bed: be careful,
eat something green, ring on Sundays.
It sounded better in the empty room.
Take the blue towels. I never liked them.
Take the tin of soup. Take the soup, I said.
Look, I am not crying, it is the dust,
this house is full of dust, I have been meaning to...
There. Take the good lamp too. It's brighter
than you think, and you will need, in the flat,
a small light left on for yourself
the way I did, all those years, on the landing.
Go on. The car's running. I'm fine.
I'll be fine. I'll be here, if you want me,
putting your childhood into boxes
and not, I promise, opening the lid.

How does the poet present the mother's hidden emotions in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 11

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The Coat in the Hall

It hung for fifty years behind the door,
a khaki shadow no one dared to move.
The cuffs were frayed. The pockets bore
a button and a pencil stub, a groove
worn by a thumb that turned some small thing round.
We children dared each other to go near.
It smelt of rain and woodsmoke, and a sound
too faint to name, like distance, like a fear.
When we asked questions, Grandad would just stroke
the collar, once, and look beyond the glass,
as if the cloth were something that he spoke
to privately. We watched the minutes pass.
The day he died, we lifted it down. It weighed
less than a coat. Less than a man. We stayed
there in the hall, not knowing what to say,
and hung it back, and left the light on, and went away.

How does the poet present the impact of war on a family in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 12

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Letter, Not Sent

Dear Ellen, the moon here is the same moon
that hangs above the Co-op roof. I checked.
We are not allowed to write of where we are,
so I will tell you small things instead:
the sparrow that has moved into the sandbags,
the way the tea tastes of tin and of the rain,
the lad from Leeds who sings flat and who knows it.
Nobody mentions tomorrow. We say
'when this is over' the way you say amen,
automatically, hoping it counts.
I have your photograph inside my cap.
It is creased now in the shape of a smile
that I have not seen in months and cannot
quite remember, only the crease.
Tell Mam I am eating. Tell the dog
that I am coming home to him in a good coat.
Tell yourself nothing. Light the lamp.
Leave it burning in the window, Ellen,
the same as always, the same as the moon.

How does the poet present the soldier's longing for home in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 13

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The Mill Whistle

The whistle cuts the dark. We pour like rain
through iron gates, a river made of caps,
and in the shed the looms begin again
their thousand-throated clatter, snaps and claps.
The cotton drifts like snow inside the air;
it settles in our hair, our lungs, our bread.
My mother worked this floor, and breathed it there;
the rest of that story is left unsaid.
Yet when the hooter sounds at six, and light
comes flat and amber down the cobbled street,
we spill out arm in arm, in loud delight,
and sing, and swap the chips, and stamp our feet.
No owner's name above the gate can claim
the hour that follows, loud and nearly ours.
It is not freedom, but it is the same
bright metal, minted small, in coins of hours.

How does the poet present the harshness of factory work in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 14

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Marking

Midnight, and the kitchen table is a field
of other people's children.
Thirty essays on a poem about a bird,
thirty ways of saying that it was sad.
I uncap the green pen (red is a shout)
and look for the sentence that stands up by itself,
the one that has escaped the drill of 'point, quote, explain'
and says something no one told it to.
Here: 'the silence is a coat the poet wears.'
I read it twice. I want to ring the boy's house
and tell his mother. Instead I write
'Yes!' and underline it, hard,
till the paper dents like a thumbprint,
a small flare sent up for morning to find.
Down the hall the radiator knocks. The tea
has grown a skin. There are twenty-nine more,
and one of them might be the next,
and that is what keeps the light on.

How does the poet present the speaker's attitude to work in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 15

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Fifteen

I stand before the mirror like a judge
who has already heard the case and will not budge.
My nose is too much nose. My hair's a crime.
My voice, a gate that creaks at the wrong time.
Everyone else was issued, so it seems,
a rulebook at birth, a map, a set of themes
for how to stand, and laugh, and not be seen
to care. I practise shrugging in the sheen
of the glass, until the shrug is almost true.
Behind me, on the wall, the posters, too,
look down, their faces perfect, flat, and kind.
Then someone calls for tea. I leave behind
the court, the verdict. Clattering down the stair,
I find, in the hall glass, someone who is there.

How does the poet present the speaker's insecurity in this poem?

[30 marks]

Unseen Poetry 16

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

Seventy

The mirror has stopped arguing with me.
It shows a woman, soft at the edges,
her hair the colour of a pencil sketch,
and I nod to her as one nods to a neighbour.
Once I would have counted every line
like a prisoner marking days on a wall.
Now I read them as I read the map of a town
I have lived in: here, the year the twins were born;
here, the winter of the long illness; here,
the laugh that dug this small canal
beside my mouth and has worked there ever since.
What I would tell her, the girl with the verdict,
is nothing, because she would not listen.
She must be allowed to be afraid.
She must be allowed to practise her shrug
until, one day, it turns into a smile.

How does the poet present the speaker's acceptance of ageing in this poem?

[30 marks]