

Unseen Poetry Practice

Slow Reader

He can make sculptures
and fabulous machines,
invent games, tell jokes,
give solemn, adult advice –
but he is slow to read.
When I take him on my knee
with his *Ladybird* book
he gazes into the air,
sighing and shaking his head
like an old man
who knows the mountains
are impassable.
He toys with words,
letting them go cold
as gristly meat,
until I relent
and let him wriggle free:
a fish returning
to its element,
or a white-eyed colt – shying
from the bit * – who sees
that if he takes it
in his mouth
he'll never run
quite free again.

VICKI FEAVER

How do you think the speaker feels about the child and his experience of learning to read **and** how does the poet present the speaker's feelings?

Advice to a Teenage Daughter

You have found a new war-game
called Love.
Here on your dressing-table
stand arrayed
brave ranks of lipsticks
brandishing
swords of cherry pink and flame.
Behold the miniature armies
of little jars,
packed with the scented
dynamite of flowers.

See the dreaded tweezers;
tiny pots
of manufactured moonlight,
stick-on-stars.
Beware my sweet;
conquest may seem easy
but you can't compete with football,
motor-cycles, cars,
cricket, computer games,
or a plate of chips.

ISOBEL TRILLING

Part (a)

What do you think the speaker is advising the daughter about in this poem?

and then Part (b)

How does the poet use language to present the advice in the poem?

Think carefully about the poems before you write your answer.
Both poems describe people's reactions to individuals on the edge of society.

6. Write about both poems and their effect on you. Show how they are similar and how they are different.

You may write about each poem separately and then compare them, or make comparisons where appropriate in your answer as a whole.

You may wish to include some or all of these points:

- *the content of the poems – what they are about;*
- *the ideas the poets may have wanted us to think about;*
- *the mood or atmosphere of the poems;*
- *how they are written – words and phrases you find interesting, the way they are organised, and so on;*
- *your responses to the poems, including how they are similar and how they are different.*

Tramp

This mad prophet
gibbers* mid-traffic,
wringing his hands
whilst mouthing at heaven.
No messages for us.
His conversation is simply
a passage through time.
He points and calls.
Our uneven stares dissuade*
approach. We fear him, his

matted hair, patched coat,
grey look from sleeping out.
We mutter amongst ourselves
and hope he keeps away. No
place for him in our heaven,
there it's clean and empty.

** gibbers – speaks so fast it sounds like nonsense*

**dissuade – persuade against*

Rupert M. Loydell.

Decomposition

I have a picture I took in Bombay
of a beggar asleep on the pavement:
grey-haired, wearing shorts and a dirty shirt,
his shadow thrown aside like a blanket.
His arms and legs could be cracks in the stone;
routes for the ants' journeys, the flies'
descents.
brain-washed by the sun into exhaustion,
he lies veined into stone, a fossil man.
Behind him, there is a crowd passingly
bemused by a pavement trickster and quite
indifferent to this very common sight
of an old man asleep on the pavement.
I thought it was a good composition
and glibly called it The Man in the Street,
remarking how typical it was of
India that the man in the street lived there.
His head in the posture of one weeping
into a pillow chides me* now for my
presumption at attempting to compose
art out of his hunger and solitude.

**chides me – tells me off*

Zulfikar Ghose

Think carefully about the poems before you write your answer.
Both poems describe people's reactions to people who don't fit into society.

6. Write about both poems and their effect on you. Show how they are similar and how they are different.

You may write about each poem separately and then compare them, or make comparisons where appropriate in your answer as a whole.

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[20 marks]

Down and Out, Paddington Station

Weighed down by paper bags
And tired, string-tied coat
She shuffled among the tables
Inspecting the abandoned drinks
Then sat and dozed the timetable away
The faded hair told nothing
Above the lines of ingrained dirt
She had a little time
Before the midnight deadline
We did not know her destination –
Perhaps a doorway in the Euston Road
The cheerful flowers mocked her
Watched by unseeing
Sleeping the sleep of the unloved.

Christine Boothroyd

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**gibbers – speaks so fast it sounds like nonsense*

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Rupert M. Loydell.

From the Motorway

Everywhere up and down the island
Britain is mending her desert:
marvellous we exclaim as we fly on it,
tying the country in a parcel.
London to Edinburgh, Birmingham to Cardiff.
No time to examine the contents,

thank you, but consider the bliss of
sitting absolutely numbed to your
nulled mind, music when you want it,
while identical miles thunder under you,
the same spot coming and going
seventy, eighty times a minute,

till you're there, wherever there
is, ready to be someone in
Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester,
they're all the same to the road,
which loves itself, which nonetheless
here and there hands you trailing

necklaces of fumes in which to be
one squeezed breather among
rich and ragged, sprinter and staggerer,
a status parade for Major Roadworks
toiling in his red-trimmed triangle,
then a regiment of wounded orange witches

defending a shamelessly naked
(rarely a stitch of work on her)
captive free lane,
which the inchlings inch on
without bite or sup, at most
a hard shoulder to creep on,

while there, on all sides,
lie your unwrapped destinations,
lanes trickling off into childhood
or anonymity, apple-scented villages
asleep in their promise of being
nowhere anyone would like to get to.

Anne Stevenson

How does the poet make *From the Motorway* such a powerful attack on motorways?

You should consider:

- how the poet describes the scenery and destinations on motorways
- how the poet describes the experience of travelling on motorways
- what the travellers on motorways are missing
- the tone of voice in the poem
- the language the poet uses
- how the poem is structured
- anything else that you think important

Foundation Tier

Your Dad Did What?

Where have they been, if they have been away,
or what they've done at home, if they have not –
you make them write about the holiday.

One writes *My Dad did*. What? Your Dad did what?

That's not a sentence. Never mind the bell.

We stay behind until the work is done.

You count their words (you who can count and spell);
all the assignments are complete bar one

and though this boy seems bright, that one is his.

He says he's finished, doesn't want to add
anything, hands it in just as it is.

No change. *My Dad did*. What? What did his Dad?

You find the 'E' you gave him as you sort
through reams of what this girl did, what that lad did,
and read the line again, just one 'e' short:

This holiday was horrible. My Dad did.

Sophie Hannah

What makes this poem so moving?

You should consider:

- what the boy wrote
- the word the boy hasn't spelled correctly
- why, perhaps, he doesn't want to change what he has written
- the teacher's attitude towards the pupils
- what the teacher realises in the last stanza
- some of the words and phrases the poet uses

- anything else that you think is important

At Cider Mill Farm

I remember my uncle's farm
Still in mid-summer
Heat hazing the air above the red roof tops
Some cattle sheds, a couple of stables
Clustered round a small yard
Lying under the hills that stretched their long back
Through three counties.
I rolled with the dogs
Among the hay bales
Stacked high in the barn he built himself
During a storm one autumn evening
Tunnelled for treasure or jumped with a scream
From a pirate ship's mast into the straw
Burrowed for gold and found he'd buried
Three battered Ford cars deep in the hay.
He drove an old tractor that sweated oil
In long black streaks down the rusty orange
It chugged and whirred, coughed into life
Each day as he clattered across the cattle grids
I remember one night my cousin and I
Dragging back cows from over the common
We prodded them homeward through the rain
And then drank tea from huge tin mugs
Feeling like farmers.
He's gone now, he sold it
But I have been back for one last look
To the twist in the lane that borders the stream
Where Mary, Ruth and I once waded
Water sloshing over our wellies
And I showed my own children my uncle's farm
The barn still leaning over the straw
With for all I know three battered Ford cars
Still buried beneath it.

David Harmer

1 Explore how David Harmer presents his experiences at Cider Mill Farm.
Use **evidence** from the poem to support your answer.

Messy Room

Whosever room this is should be ashamed!
His underwear is hanging on the lamp.
His raincoat is there in the overstuffed chair,
And the chair is becoming quite mucky and damp.
His workbook is wedged in the window,

His sweater's been thrown on the floor.
His scarf and one ski are beneath the TV,
And his pants have been carelessly hung on the door.
His books are all jammed in the closet,
A lizard named Ed is asleep in his bed,
His vest has been left in the hall.
And his smelly old sock has been stuck to the wall.
Whoever room this is should be ashamed!
Donald or Robert or Willie or--
Huh? You say it's mine? Oh, dear,
I knew it looked familiar!

Shel Silverstein

***1** Explain how Shel Silverstein presents the subject of a messy room.

Write about:

- what happens in the poem
- how the writer has organised the poem
- how the writer uses language for effect.

Use **evidence** from the poem to support your answer.