



Unseen Poetry

English past Exam Questions

Higher Level

2013

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer **either** Question 1 or Question 2.

The Fist

The fist clenched round my heart
loosens a little, and I gasp
brightness; but it tightens
again. When have I ever not loved
the pain of love? But this has moved

past love to mania. This has the strong
clench of the madman, this is
gripping the ledge of unreason, before
plunging howling into the abyss.

Hold hard then, heart. This way at least you live.

Derek Walcott

1. (a) Walcott expresses powerful emotions in this poem. Choose one emotion present in the poem and briefly explain how it is conveyed. Make reference to the text in support of your answer. (10)
- (b) Write a brief personal response to the final line of the poem.
Hold hard then, heart. This way at least you live.
Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

OR

2. Discuss the poet's use of language in "The Fist". Your answer should make close reference to the text. (20)

2012

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer either Question 1 or Question 2.

The Beautiful Lie

He was about four, I think...it was so long ago.
In a garden; he'd done some damage
behind a bright screen of sweet-peas
- snapped a stalk, a stake, I don't recall,
but the grandmother came and saw, and asked him
"Did you do that?"

Now, if she'd said *why* did you do that,
he'd never have denied it. She showed him
he had a choice. I could see in his face
the new sense, the possible. That word and deed
need not match, that you could say the world
different, to suit you.

When he said "No", I swear it was as moving
as the first time a baby's fist clenches
on a finger, as momentous as the first
taste of fruit. I could feel his eyes looking
through a new window, at a world whose form
and colour weren't fixed

but fluid, that poured like a snake, trembled
around the edges like northern lights, shape-shifted
at the spell of a voice. I could sense him filling
like a glass, hear the unreal sea in his ears.
*This is how to make songs, create men, paint pictures,
tell a story.*

I think I made up the screen of sweet-peas.
Maybe they were beans, maybe there was no screen:
it just felt as if there should be, somehow.
And he was my- no, I don't need to tell that.
I know I made up the screen. And I recall very well
what he had done.

Sheenagh Pugh

1. (a) From your reading of this poem, explain your understanding of the title, *The Beautiful Lie*. (10)
- (b) Choose one image from the poem that appealed to you. Explain your choice. (10)

OR

2. Write a personal response to this poem, highlighting the impact it makes on you. Your answer should make close reference to the text. (20)

2011

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

In the following poem, entitled *Poetry*, Leanne O’Sullivan addresses the mysterious source of her inspiration and considers her experience of writing poetry.

Answer **either** Question 1 or Question 2.

Poetry

I can never find a pen when you come,
when you snap me up on your lizard tongue,
and wrap yourself around me as if I were a spool.
Vague as metaphors you tease, trawling
your shadows as feathering clouds do,
shedding infant vowels in your vaporous image.
You will never be perfected,
and while you are half-born I will never sleep.

In pickling ink I preserve all your fruits;
perhaps you are a prophecy,
a mouthing of the boundless,
or some God or other Minerva* festering
like secrets in empty lines.
Years gone now, labouring to drain
the reddest blood from your throat,
and I am none the wiser.

Leanne O’Sullivan

*Minerva: Goddess associated with artistic creativity.

1. (a) Comment on **one** emotion expressed by the poet in this poem. Refer to the text in your answer. (10)
- (b) Choose a line or phrase from the poem that impressed you. Explain your choice. (10)

OR

2. Write a personal response to this poem. Your answer should make close reference to the text. (20)

2010

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.

Seed

The first warm day of spring
and I step out into the garden from the gloom
of a house where hope had died
to tally the storm damage, to seek what may
have survived. And finding some forgotten
lupins I'd sown from seed last autumn
holding in their fingers a raindrop each
like a peace offering, or a promise,
I am suddenly grateful and would
offer a prayer if I believed in God.
But not believing, I bless the power of seed,
its casual, useless persistence,
and bless the power of sun,
its conspiracy with the underground,
and thank my stars the winter's ended.

Paula Meehan

1. (a) What in your view is the mood of this poem? Explain briefly how it is conveyed. Make reference to the text in support of your answer. (10)
- (b) Choose one image from the poem that appealed to you. Explain your choice. (10)

OR

2. Write a personal response to this poem, highlighting the impact it makes on you. Your answer should make close reference to the text. (20)

2009

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer **either** Question 1 or Question 2.

In this poem, Anne Carson recalls her father and, in particular, his final illness during which he goes back to being like a child again.

FATHER'S OLD BLUE CARDIGAN

Now it hangs on the back of the kitchen chair
where I always sit, as it did
on the back of the kitchen chair where he always sat.

I put it on whenever I come in,
as he did, stamping
the snow from his boots.

I put it on and sit in the dark.
He would not have done this.
Coldness comes paring down from the moonbone in the sky.

His laws were a secret.
But I remember the moment at which I knew
he was going mad inside his laws.

He was standing at the turn of the driveway when I arrived.
He had on the blue cardigan with the buttons done up all the way to the top.
Not only because it was a hot July afternoon

but the look on his face –
as a small child who has been dressed by some aunt early in the morning
for a long trip

on cold trains and windy platforms
will sit very straight at the edge of his seat
while the shadows like long fingers

over the haystacks that sweep past
keep shocking him
because he is riding backwards.

1. Write a response to the above poem, highlighting the impact it makes on you. (20)

OR

2. (a) What impression of Anne Carson's father do you get from reading this poem?
Support your view by reference to the poem. (10)
- (b) Briefly describe the mood or feeling you get from reading this poem and
illustrate your answer from the text. (10)

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer either Question 1 or Question 2.

Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labour 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 austere¹ and lonely offices²?

Robert Hayden

1. austere: harsh, strict
2. office: duty, service, daily worship

1. (a) What impression of the father-son relationship do you get from this poem? (10)
- (b) Choose a phrase or line from the poem that impressed you. Explain your choice. (10)

OR

2. Write a personal response to this poem. Your answer should make close reference to the text. (20)

2007

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer **either** Question 1 or Question 2.

(Ben Ziman-Bright is a young poet from London. He won the Young Poets on the Underground Competition in 2004 with this poem. It was displayed on the London Underground.)

Rhapsody

Sat in the cheap seats
Of Symphony Hall, squinting
As the instruments tuned up,
I could pick out only you:
Fourth row back and clutching
Your viola, bright hair spilt
Across the strings. You were
Deep in a flurry of pages
With bitten lip, too
Intent on forcing that
Melody right to the cheap seats
To notice me up there, ears straining
To block out any sound but yours.

Ben Ziman-Bright

1. Describe the impact that this poem makes on you as a reader. (20)

OR

2. Discuss the ways in which this poem captures the emotions felt by the poet. (20)

2006

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer either Question 1 or Question 2.

The Toy Horse

Somebody, when I was young, stole my toy horse,
The charm of my morning romps, my man's delight.
For two days I grieved, holding my sorrow like flowers
Between the bars of my sullen angry mind.

Next day I went out with evil in my heart,
Evil between my eyes and at the tips of my hands,
Looking for my enemy at the armed stations,
Until I found him, playing in his garden

With my toy horse, urgent in the battle
Against the enemies of his Unreason's land:
He was so happy, I gave him also
My vivid coloured crayons and my big glass marble.

Valentin Iremonger

1. Do you think the poem gives a surprising insight into a childhood experience?

In your answer you might consider:

- *the pattern of the child's thinking*
- *the words and images in the poem.*

(20)

OR

2. Write a response to the above poem, highlighting aspects of it that you liked and/or disliked.

(20)

2005

Paper 2 – Section 3 Q A

A UNSEEN POEM (20 marks)

Answer either Question 1 or Question 2.

BACK YARD

Shine on, O moon of summer,
Shine to the leaves of grass, catalpa and oak,
All silver under your rain tonight.

An Italian boy is sending songs to you tonight from an accordion.
A Polish boy is out with his best girl; they marry next month;
tonight they are throwing you kisses.

An old man next door is dreaming over a sheen
that sits in a cherry tree in his back yard.

The clocks say I must go – I stay here sitting on the back porch
drinking white thoughts you rain down.

Shine on, O moon,
Shake out more and more silver changes.

Carl Sandburg

1. (a) Do you like the world that the poet describes in this poem? Give reasons for your answer supporting them by reference to the text. (10)
- (b) Choose a line or two that you find particularly appealing and explain why. (10)

OR

2. Write a personal response to the poem 'Back Yard'. (20)