

# Whisperings

Suggested answers for TEST YOURSELF questions  
for Selected Poems

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**NB: TEST YOURSELF QUESTIONS**

- The TEST YOURSELF questions are found in the **WHISPERINGS** poetry anthology.
- The page reference after the title of each poem refers to the precise location of the poem and TEST YOURSELF questions in the **WHISPERINGS** poetry anthology.
- The TEST YOURSELF questions include two types of questions:
  - those without an asterisk - these are intended for all the Learners to attempt ; and
  - Those with an asterisk (\*) – these are intended mainly for Home Language Learners to attempt.
- However, for purposes of the 2009 examination IGNORE the ABOVE distinction in the TEST YOURSELF questions (and answers). The Learners MUST work through

**EITHER**

the ENTIRE list of 15, PRESCRIBED, Home language poems (identified on page 2);

**OR**

the ENTIRE list of 10, First Additional language level poems (identified on page 2), questions (and answers) because the selection of poems has been confirmed by the Department of Education (in CIRCULAR S5 of 2008) for these levels respectively.

**NOTE**

If a word (in the Answers to the TEST YOURSELF questions) is underlined, that means it has been explained in the Glossary (pages 239-242) of the *Whisperings* poetry anthology.

If a poets name is underlined, it means that it has been mentioned in the Biographical notes (pages 243 -266) and elsewhere in the *Whisperings* poetry anthology.

**Chinua Achebe “Refugee Mother and Child” (p 2)**

1. The poem conveys a crowded environment lacking food and water. The exhaustion of both children and parents is conveyed in their silence.
2. He suggests the lack of facilities, as well as lack of care and the sheer impossibility of the task of trying to keep the children clean any longer.
3. Mothers – Both cared deeply about and took responsibility for their children. Children – Both were to die untimely deaths which the mothers could not prevent.
4. She is different – she is still involved with trying to care for her child. Her love is still evident.
5. Unlikely. Probably they are too exhausted to care and have given up all hope.
6. This would be the life of the readers – the usual family circumstances.
7. This was her act of mourning and respect, just as putting flowers on graves is.
- \*8. He intends to highlight the terrible consequences of strife but reminds us that love can continue – that this mother continues to celebrate the life of her child while surrounded by death.
- \*9. They are not able to deal with the fact that they have lost everything and are going to lose their children too.
- \*10. It suggests a mere shadow of life. There is a hint of a smile, a mere suggestion of pride. However, it also reminds us of the prevalence of death in the camp.
- \*11. She is too exhausted to make a sound, but her love and pride continue.
- \*12. This would be the life that most of us know. Mothers routinely comb their children’s hair, not even noticing really that they have done so, and send them off neat and tidy to school. Here combing the hair becomes the last rite of love this mother can provide.
- \*13. What should have been an ordinary act of caring became a tender farewell.
- \*14. In the first three lines he makes his statement. Thereafter he amplifies it.

**Shabbir Banoobhai “You Cannot Know The Fears I Have” (p 20)**

1. The parent is so keen to share the wonder of this world and the deep thoughts that he has that he may swamp the child with ideas and impressions and confuse rather than enlighten.
2. This suggests, firstly, a fragile, delicate beauty. It also implies that the child will just have emerged, much as a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, and that its beauty will only just have been seen for the first time.
- 3.1 An eclipse casts a shadow over the earth. Similarly, some event or circumstance may negatively impact on the child, even possibly causing the eyes to close permanently in death in which case the light of his life would be eclipsed.
- 3.2 The name of the child shall bring “light”. This light will shine even during the eclipse. The joy of having the child will bring inner peace.
- 4 Stanzas 1–5 highlight the fears of the parent about what lies ahead. In stanzas 6 and 7 the parent has reached peace and, having expressed the fears, is ready to embrace the child, knowing that this birth will bring satisfaction and fulfillment.
- \*5. This poem is not just about this parent’s fears, but is trying to express all the fears of any parent-to-be. The “I” therefore is not so significant. Moreover, it is the baby which will bring significance.
- \*6. This question has already been answered with reference to Question 5. It is merely re-phrased at a HG level here. The tone is one of fearfulness, uncertainty and anxiety initially but clarifies into one of peace.
- \*7. The sun is meant to bring light, not darkness – hence the paradox. The world, however, contains much which is bleak and dark (especially South Africa at the time of writing) and which can destroy rather than create life. The “other worlds” represent the realms which the child’s spirit inhabited before birth – worlds of imagined light, innocence and music.
- \*8. The poet realises that to care less – and so to be less fearful – would mean that the child was being loved less. And it is unconditional love that gives life meaning and purpose.
- \*9. Possibly it suggests that the child is now being embraced as a person, not just an idea or a possibility. The child is being accorded a name which recognises one’s existence.

**e e cummings “i thank You God for most this amazing” (p 52)**

1. He uses them to refer to God, Whom he sees as greater than all that surrounds him and as the one from Whom it all comes. He, himself, is not important. The focus is on God so “i” stresses his relative insignificance.
2. He is including everything that is positive or affirming.
3. He thanks God for nature – the freshness of the vegetation, the blue of the sky, everything “natural” which makes him aware of the abundance of life.
4. He cannot comprehend that people can doubt that there is a God – even though God is beyond imagining.
- \*5. Joyful, exuberant – the whole poem is a celebration of nature and of the fact that he is now in the mood (after sadness? after winter?) to appreciate it.
- \*6. This first usage refers to a day of celebration – a birthday. The second suggests perhaps that the stress falls, not on the celebration, but on what has been re-born in terms of his reawakened appreciation.
- \*7. Humans are more than “nothing”; they are also more than “things”. They are human beings capable of love and enjoyment.
- \*8. This implies that his inner eyes and ears have been stimulated to appreciate things. He no longer just sees or hears the sounds; now he notices them with appreciation.
- \*9. There are so many examples of all these. The key to answering this lies in explaining the purpose not the quirkiness of the punctuation, vocabulary or syntax. The purpose will vary. For punctuation there could be the suggestion that the emotion is bubbling over, making pauses too difficult to uphold. The play on words enables him to create something fresh which the reader has to examine more closely than he/she would a more usual word. The sentence structure is governed by a desire to fore-ground and also to convey the rush of thoughts in a “stream of consciousness” mode.
- \*10. His colloquial language relates to the answer to Question 9. Sometimes, as in speech, he interrupts his main stream of thought to add in an extra idea that seems to have just occurred to him. The enjambment also conveys speech rather than carefully crafted lines.

**C Day-Lewis “Walking Away” (p 54)**

1. He sees the child as a satellite, dependent on the planet to determine its orbit through gravity, being pulled out of its path by some event and no longer having any set routine determined for it. The child will have to select his own path now. He sees the child as being like a young bird being set free into a wild place when it is not really ready to fend for itself, and cannot find a proper path to follow. This suggests his pain that his child is not ready for this separation. He compares the child to a seed let loose from a plant. It has to start a life of its own and cannot depend on the adult any longer. This has to happen to his child as this is the way nature works. The learner must choose two of these images.
2. The season is changing in their relationship too. They have known the summer days of sharing and being together. Now they are seeing the death of that time – just as autumn heralds the death of the year.
3. Simile. “like a winged seed ...”
4. He is also hurting as he is torn between going to his father to share the day and being one of the crowd. This is a hard decision, but is also part of growing up.
5. The son is walking away from the father into the new life of adulthood; the father is walking away in that he allows his son to do this. He is not pursuing him.
- \*6. The “wilderness” suggests the area is not tamed or necessarily safe. In all three images the offspring is moving into unknown areas which may not treat him well. This is what will make the child grow independent, but it is hard for the parent not to shelter the young one.
- \*7. This is a natural phenomenon. This seemed like a small event – it would not be seen as significant by others – but it was an “ordeal” for the father and the son. However, it is things like this which have to happen to harden one and make one useful and strong.
- \*8. One is able to confirm that one loves a person by letting them have independence. If one did not do this, they would not develop properly so one would be harming one’s offspring and that would suggest one did not love them.
- \*9. The father is musing on this scene and is struggling to put his thoughts into perspective. This is why the poem is full of enjambment and why, although the rhyme scheme is regular, the rhythm is more disjointed as he stops to ponder the significance of the event. The tone is thoughtful and wistful as he longs for the past although he knows this had to happen.
- \*10. The information for this is largely covered in the answer to Question 1. Learners need to indicate that one is a metaphor and the others are similes. The learners also need to comment more specifically on the components of the comparison.

**Sandile Dikeni “Love Poem for My Country” (p 60)**

1. Personification. The valley, the veld and the mountains all speak.
2. Love/proud – pride – delight – praise – passion – celebrate
3. The valleys, the veld, the mountains, the seas, the resources, and the people evoke his love.
4. Stanza 1 – the birds would be raptors, the “circle of life” includes death  
Stanza 2 – a “reptile” is often a metaphor for evil  
Stanza 3 – baboons can be destructive and ungainly [not very elegant!]  
Stanza 4 – the sea can be dangerous as can the mines; the miner sees little of the gold  
Stanza 5 – there is hope – not yet necessarily fulfilment.
- \*5. Innuendo
- \*6. The repetition would make it easy for a crowd to follow the sentence structure – even without the words in front of them; the first line is declamatory (can be stated proudly and boldly) the word-pictures are of places which people could relate to; there are many times when a simple gesture could be used to stress the concept that is being put across; the pause before the last line would add impact and bring an enthusiastic response.

**T.S. Eliot “Preludes” (p 75)**

1. He is comparing the end of the day to the butt of a cigarette. Both are useless and unproductive; both are finished and hold no promise; both are dirty and smelly – nothing to be desired.
2. This should include references to indicate the grime, the poverty, the lack of productive life, the routine, the lack of anything beautiful and the undermining of individuality.
3. Their life is a sham, an act. They merely go through the motions, but there is no real living spirit within them. Moreover, as they go through their daily routines they do not reveal themselves to others.
4. The evening and the morning are the same each day – nature cannot reach there so there is little difference to the “light ... between the shutters”. The actions of the citizens are always the same. Lines 41 and 42 create a sense of endless trudging. The last two lines convey a ritual which has always and will always be the same. The fact that this links in with Prelude 1 suggests the very poem is a cyclic one, going over and over the same scene.
5. The city de-personalises you. There is no room for identity or for personality. He uses synecdoche.
6. Personification. It “comes to consciousness”; it “came back”; it “crept up”.
7. The cab-horse is “lonely”; the woman mentioned in Prelude 3 is alone and even the final prelude suggests no communication taking place.
8. There is no hope of future fulfilment or nourishment for his soul. It is stifled by the “city block”.
- \*9. The newspaper is just blowing in the wind, irritating and not serving any function. This same newspaper seemed to convey “certain certainties” in Prelude 4 and had shaped the opinion of the city-dweller to a particular viewpoint. So that which had been so convincing now lies discarded.
- \*10. A prelude is an introduction to something more important, but there is nothing great to follow here. Perhaps people just wait for something to happen? But the world will merely “revolve”. There is no hope of something greater.
- \*11. He is moved by their plight, sensing that there is something more to them – there is a core, a spirituality which is suffering because it is being suppressed. So his mood is one of sadness or concern or even awareness. However, this is substituted by a hardness or harshness – a suggestion that one just has to continue like this, for this is all life entails.



**Zulfikar Ghose “Decomposition” (p 88)**

1. He wanted to show people how the poor in India had to live. He also felt that this scene would make a good photograph as it satisfied him aesthetically.
2. The phrase “the man in the street” is a widely-used phrase to suggest the average person. He is therefore making a pun as it refers to this man photographed literally lying in the street and, figuratively, it suggests that the average poor person in India may well have to live like this.
3. It struck him on re-looking at the photograph that the way the man lay was exactly how one would lie if one were weeping into one’s pillow. He was shocked that he had not noticed this and he realised he had been so keen on getting a good photograph that he had not really had any interest in the person.
4. He realised he was superficial, uncaring, unfeeling – as bad as the crowd in the background.
5. The crowd in the background had also ignored the man in the street, not because they were entranced by the juggler/magician – they glanced only “passingly” at him – but because they had become callous about the suffering of others, seeing it so often.
6. Decomposition means breaking down. When he looks at the photograph again, seeing its pathos, he realises that it shows a person whose body was “decomposing” gradually from weakness. Perhaps society is also “decomposing” because it shows so little compassion for one of its own. He is also stressing that he is de-composing the composition of the photograph by analysing it like this. It is no longer “art” to him but a reminder of his insensitivity.
- \*7. He was sad that he had used an art form to display misery but is composing another piece of art to record his insensitivity! The difference is that he is focused on the person not the art form now, and that through this poem he may persuade others to care.
- \*8. His shadow is like a blanket which has been tossed “aside like a blanket” – a simile. Even his shadow is no protection for him. He probably has no blanket to cover himself.
- \*9. “Brain-washed” suggests bullying one into agreement. This man has no sense of fight left in him. It is as if he accepts his status and his lot in life – just as compliant or docile as brain-washing would aim to make one. “veined” suggests that his blood-vessels, carrying his life-blood, are prominent. However, he is so lifeless that they seem more like veins in a stone, mere cracks rather than life-giving. This metaphor almost suggests he is more carving than human.  
 “A fossil man” would have been dead for centuries. It seems this man has also been dead for ages for all the interest that is shown in him. He might as well be stone – in fact a fossil would get more attention! It also suggests how still he is, how lifeless.

**John Keats “To Autumn” (p 126)**

1. Stanza 1 conveys the ripeness, the maturing of the fruit, the fulfilment that comes in autumn.  
Stanza 2 shows autumn gathering in the produce and resting from the labours of the year.  
Stanza 3 gently introduces the idea that autumn signifies the end or death of the year – but there is fulfilment and promise in the dying.
2. Keats imagines autumn as a friend of the Sun because they work together to ensure that every crop reaches maturity. Autumn also (in Stanza 2) is depicted as satisfied, as able to relax and to rest, fulfilled, after the labour of harvesting. There is a tinge of sadness about autumn but that is not overwhelming because there is the promise of future spring.
3. The auditory – sense of hearing – “songs”, “music”, “wailful”, “bleat”, “sing”, “whistles”, “twitters” and the visual – “bloom”, “rosy hue”.
4. The swallows gather to migrate – sad, because this marks the end of the natural year – but they migrate to return again in spring so the cycle will continue. The dying of the year is not the end.
5. The “maturing sun” becomes the “soft-dying” (sunset) of the day; the “fruitfulness” is now only evident in the “stubble-fields” which have been harvested.
- \*6. He uses the soft “s” and “m” sounds to suggest something gentle, “mellow”, rather than the usual harsh image of autumn.
- \*7. This suggests tricking or plotting and is usually seen as underhand and suspicious. Here, it may happen behind the scenes, as it were, but its purpose is constructive. This is also the first hint that Autumn is personified throughout the poem.
- \*8. Yes. The last stanza is quieter and less vibrant than the first but it is not mournful. There is still beauty; there is still life – the lambs have matured and will bear off-spring in the new year; the swallows depart to conserve their lives and to return in spring. There is fulfilment in death, not pain.
- \*9. The tone is one of quiet, satisfied joy at seeing growth reaching its climax. Keats always aimed for maturity and he conveys that he has reached it and can view the future through his fulfilment and face whatever storms winter will bring.
- \*10. “o’er-brimm’d” – the brim is the top of the cup so this suggests overfull; “soft-lifted” – one gets the picture of hair moving gently in the wind; “barred” – clouds in layers or bars of colour at sunset; “bloom” – suggesting causing fields and the sky to blossom into colour.
- \*11. All the verbs stress the abundance of the amount produced – “load” and “bless” (fruit on the vines); “bend” (the trees with apples); “fill” (all ripeness); “swell” (the gourd); “plump” (the hazel shells).
- \*12. Stanza 1 is exuberant, cheerful, and the rhythm reflects the cheerful packing of one image onto another. The use of the verb-form “to ...” helps to keep the rhythm flowing as one does not have to stop and start sentences with subjects each time. Stanza 2 is gentler and the rhythm slows to match the resting after the labour of harvesting. The alliteration of “s” contributes to this, as does the assonance, e.g. furrow ... sound ... drowsed. “Thy” is also a slow sound and the re-introduction of subjects for each verb helps to slow the pace. Stanza 3 has a more wistful rhythm, aided by assonance and onomatopoeia to convey the sounds in the midst of the peaceful passing of the year. There is no struggle; the rhythm just lets the poem ebb to a close.

**Douglas Livingstone “Sunstrike” (p 146)**

1. The first indication is that the heat haze makes the hills seem to dance wildly (personification). The horizon, too, is no longer stable, seeming to flow like melted metal in the heat. “Molten” metal also carries the connotation of heat. The lack of water implies heat over the years or centuries which has dried up the river. The sand is bleached by the customary brightness of a glaring sun. The sensation of heat is picked up in the final stanza, too, when Livingstone says the man swam in “fire”, splashing “hot” drops.
2. The poet describes the sand as “flowing in ripples” – a description which carries the memory of a thirst-quenching stream. The sand is described as “unquenchable”. This is a transferred epithet as it is the man whose thirst is unquenchable, not the sand. The poet describes his eyes as looking “thirstily” at the stones – a metaphor to convey intense longing. Ironically, the diamonds he finds are alluvial ones, formed in the river which has dried now. The metaphors “swimming”, “drinking” and “splashing” describe the man’s crazed actions in the final stanza – all water images, as are “drops” rather than grains of sand.
3. This reminds us that the stones would be of no use to the prospector as he would not live to realise their value. The personification of the stones conveys an almost evil, tantalising action. If they are a mirage or heat-induced image (as we believe, because no one find would include such a variety of stones), then the hallucination is mocking him.
4. The hills are grey and we get an impression of a wide expanse of white sand. Against this we have the final flashes of colour from the stones creating a focus on this “find”.
5. There is an innuendo of death. The crows are “assembling” in an orderly fashion (unlike the man who is thrashing around) rather like a black-robed choir gathering for a funeral. This is further developed by the use of the word “haloes”, implying a holiness. The horrible irony is that they are waiting to devour the carcass.
6. The irony is that, when he wanted diamonds, he could not find them. Now that he needs water, he cannot find it either. The sadness of the irony lies in the fact that, although stones would be useless to him, he continues to value them. If he does in fact find something, there is the irony of finding wealth but being unable to use it.
- \*7. In the first stanza there is a suggestion of the hills dancing crazily, which echoes the crazy behaviour of the prospector, both as he digs for water and in his final moments. There is the desperate need for water compared with the fact that water was needed to form the alluvial diamonds he hopes to find. The prospector looks “thirstily” at his palm, reflecting his need for water. There is the loneliness of the prospector versus the “choir” of crows and the implied comparison of the “locked” vision of the man with the one purpose of the crows.
- \*8. The title is a pun on the idea of a person who gets sunstroke, which often causes one to hallucinate and even to die, and the concept of making a “strike” in the sense of discovering something unexpectedly. One can also see connotations of death striking him down.

**Charles Mungoshi “If You Don’t Stay Bitter For Too Long” (p 162)**

1. The poet is sharing his feelings but not insisting that one agree. It starts as a tentative suggestion but moves on to confidence in the last three lines.
2. He realises that one has to go back without bitterness or anger to benefit. Consequently, he is stressing that a change in attitude is a pre-condition for finding value in the past.
3. He does not say, but implies, that one left as a young person, not understanding all that one saw so one may have to re-build bridges, e.g. with “father”. Possibly, facing up to what one left will also be hard. One may have to acknowledge what one has lost.
4. The smoke of autumn is writing. This is a human action. Perhaps there is a hint of an allusion to the “smoke signals” of earlier times. The smoke on the lands would be cleaner and more fragrant than that of a city or of a war. The skies are more open so one has a wider vision. One would be able to get life in perspective under those circumstances.
- \*5. Stanza 1 suggests you “might ... salvage”, whereas stanza 5 states that you “will discover”. Stanza 5 is, therefore, far more positive. Stanza 5 also goes on to enlarge on what you will find, as opposed to the “something” which may be “salvaged”. The word “salvaged” suggests rescued from wreckage, whereas in the last stanza the sky is “high” and the whole feel of the place is crisp and promising.
- \*6. The free verse allows the poem to gain momentum as he proceeds. There is a tumble of ideas of what could be “salvaged”, and he is not restricted in expressing them. Also he is suggesting uncertainty as he is in two minds about “the old country’s” place in his life.

**Sylvia Plath “Mushrooms” (p 177)**

1. They are threatening because they move so quietly to become such a huge force. They have the ability to multiply and to take over if they are not checked, but they are unlikely to be checked as one does not notice them until they have asserted themselves in huge numbers. Plath uses the words “Our foot’s in the door” as the ultimate menace, but she has hinted earlier with the idea of “Take hold” and “insist” and the repetition of “So many of us!”
2. They move quickly – “overnight”. They move “very quietly”, so “Nobody sees us, stops us, betrays us”.
3. They seem so fragile and so relatively easy to get rid of because they are of no account. However, they are amazingly powerful and establish themselves so securely that they are not so easy to destroy.
4. She repeats the “ly” to use alliteration in the first stanza. This emphasises the sneaky advance of the mushrooms. In stanza 3 she repeats the structures to suggest their insignificance. The repetition of structures occurs constantly throughout the poem to convey menace. The seventh stanza has the repetition of “So many of us”, which conveys the ominous tones of an invasion. The repeated use of “we” and “our” suggests the might of the many.
5. She is looking at nature and conveying how even the smallest thing in nature is stronger than man. This rather puts man in his place.
6. Alliteration is seen in stanza 1 with the repetition of “ly” to convey the quiet advance of the mushrooms. The “s” is also repeated in stanzas 2 and 3 to convey the silence of their approach. Assonance is apparent in stanza 2 with the repetition of the “o”.
- \*7. These lines could refer to a child imagining a fairy book where mushrooms are used as furniture. They could imply that mushrooms take over inanimate objects too, growing in the damp especially. This would be more in keeping with the menace.
- \*8. The short lines and three-line stanzas strike one as small and insignificant but they are powerful like the mushrooms.

### Mongane Wally Serote “City Johannesburg” (p 190)

1. The speaker is a black man who has to commute in and out of Johannesburg to work each day from his home. He speaks on behalf of all those who live in similar circumstances – the “women and men” who are mentioned in the fourth last line.
2. He is dependent on the city for employment. The township offers no way to make money. He is aware that the city has “power” over him because of this (line 31) and he feels insignificant or “feeble” (line 31) in comparison.
3. Johannesburg is dependent on him for his labour to keep it running. But in a sense, it demands everything of him – “my flesh”, “my mind” and “my blood”. It is a symbiotic relationship; he cannot live without the city and the city cannot exist without him.
4. Johannesburg is described as a place of order and control – “roboted roads” are neatly ruled in “black and white” (line 19). (Is this an ironic mention of the divisions into black and white areas?) The township is full of “dust”, “dongas” and “comic houses”. Johannesburg is remote from nature and he uses non-living adjectives to convey this – with “neon flowers”, “electric wind” and “cement trees”. The township has “dust” and soil although erosion is prevalent and forms “dongas”. There is “whirling dust” not “electric wind”. The townships have “dark” places where danger and “death” “lurks” in the form of criminals, whereas the city has lights to offset the “falling darkness”. The city is a place of “iron breath” – a monster – polluting their lives, literally and figuratively. The city has luxuries – lights, roads, etc. whereas the township has no suggestion of this. There is no mention of people in the city; it is as though it is some vast machine working a fixed routine from “six” to “five”. The townships contain his “people” and his “love”.
5. In the final lines, Johannesburg is portrayed as a place of “death” because it destroys life and “fun”. It sucks them “dry”. The people want to weep, but even their “tears” are as dry as the dongas in the townships. Everything which happens there has resulted from the aridness of the system (apartheid) in the city (and in the whole country) which dehumanises the black people and destroys their capacity for life.
6. “Salute” suggests a gesture showing respect, yet it is ironic that he is simply grabbing for his pass to show his right to be there. The city doesn’t want his respect, just his obedience.  
 The verb “pulses” implies a regular, automatic movement like a heartbeat (the heartbeat of the city?) and it is automatic to search for the pass. The hand “rears” – this is an aggressive simile suggesting that he is dependent on the city for his income but he is not just compliant.  
 The stomach “groans” and “devours” as he personifies his need to work and the pittance that he gets paid for it. He has to “run out” or “roar” in to the city as he dare not be late or he will offend and go hungry.
- \*7. The social engineering is conveyed by the fact that it is the black people who have to travel by public transport each day at “six” and “five”, by the fact that their “houses and people” are not in the city. The contrasts have been reflected in the answer to Question 4. In fact, this is the exact image that the poet tried to convey in the poem. This is the result of the economic policies and the segregation which occurred.
- \*8. No. His final lines seem to beg Johannesburg to wake up and realise what it is doing. They are almost like a prayer for the city. He has personified the city and there is a sense in which he loves it, which is why he begs it to change.

**William Shakespeare Sonnet 104: To Me, Fair Friend, You Can Never Be Old (p194)**

1. In each case he refers to seasons. These seasons were at their best. They change to a season which is not so wonderful. In each case time has passed.
2. Time has passed like the seasons. Just as the seasons move from the height of their beauty, so it is probable that his loved one is no longer as beautiful as when they first met.
3. The summer trees were leafy and splendid. When winter's cold wind came, it stripped the trees, removing that beauty, just as hard times might remove the loved one's beauty. The spring was magnificent but, when autumn came, all that beauty became tatty, yellowed and old. The same could happen to his love whose beauty could also fade. The plants in April (the blossoms of spring) are sweet-smelling but the heat of June removes the perfumes and one is no longer aware of them. The freshness of his love may fade as life becomes more demanding.
4. No. He accepts that his love is aging, but he is not aware of it as he has moved beyond noticing the externals. He is still entranced.
5. No. At least, he does not say so. All he is saying is that beauty *may* fade. Nowhere does it declare that it has faded into ugliness.
- \*6. The sundial moves so slowly that one cannot see that time is passing. Similarly, beauty fades imperceptibly slowly and the observer may not actually see the changes happening. However, time is moving on and beauty is suffering from the passing years.
- \*7. Although it is not absolutely clear, it seems that he is warning the future generations that they can never reach the heights of beauty of his love. The "summer" of this beauty was better than any other beauty could ever be.
- \*8. The sonnet has 14 lines, as is usual. The rhyme scheme is that of a sonnet: *abab cdcd efef gg*. The couplet is used, according to the convention, as a final declaration to back up the argument. However, in this sonnet he does not use the quatrains to express a single thought. The three images of the seasons overlap quatrains 1 and 2. Nor does he stick strictly to the rhythm of five beats to a line according to iambic pentameter, e.g. line 9, although the rhythm does flow.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley “Ozymandias” (p 200)**

1. “vast” (line 1) and “colossal” (line 13)
2. Ozymandias made a huge statue to reflect his status. He seemed to tower over the world (“to bstride the narrow world like a Colossus” as Shakespeare put it in Julius Ceasar). His fall is made even more apparent.
3. Ozymandias was arrogant and used to getting his own way. He does not seem to have cared about people, nor to have been a happy person. Instead, he frowned and wanted to ensure that others paid him due respect. He addresses the “Mighty” and expects that they, too, should quake before him.
4. He uses it in lines 1–7 and again in the last three lines of the poem. Each time the sound suggests the silence and emptiness of the desert.
5. Ozymandias imagined that men would quake before him. He saw himself as “king of kings”, yet his empire crumbled and there is no evidence of his power. The words on the pedestal, therefore, no longer remind men to fear the Pharaoh, but to remember that their power, too, will fade. No one can hold on to power.
- \*6. Lines 1–7 are one long sentence. This suggests the dramatic description, perhaps, by the traveller, as he breathlessly accounts his tale. Then there is a three-word sentence, which is a clever anti-climax: “Nothing besides remains.” The simplicity and brevity of this sentence contrasts with the complexity of the first. The last sentence meanders over three lines to suggest the emptiness of the desert.
- \*7. Yes, it could be, for it shows that everything, including political clout, comes to dust. History reduces one to size, no matter how great one was. However, it is addressed at all people for it is wise to remember that we all will be forgotten. Shelley seems to suggest that art will survive longer than anything else.
- \*8. This makes Ozymandias seem even more vague and shadowy. We just hear about him, somewhere, from somebody. How far removed this is from the rumours which were around when he was “king of kings”.



**William Butler Yeats “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death” (p 233)**

1. “A lonely impulse of delight drove to this tumult in the clouds”. This line suggests that he enlisted because he had this sudden desire to experience the thrill of flying.
2. No. The poem states clearly that he “balanced all”. This means that he considered what he had experienced already in life and what he could expect to experience in the future before he made up his mind. He labelled these a “waste”, suggesting that to experience them without this fulfilment would leave him empty.
3. He did not hate the enemy. He did not love those whom he was protecting. Most men enlisting in the First World War expressed one of these emotions when they signed up.
4. He mentions four things: a law which forced them to serve; a sense of duty; politicians promoting the war effort; and crowds cheering them on as heroes.
5. Antithesis. “In balance with this life, this death”
6. He declares “I know that I shall meet my fate”. He also talks of his “likely end”.
- \*7. Throughout the poem he balances ideas. In lines 3 and 4 he balances hating and loving, as well as “fighting” and “guarding”. He considers his “country” and his “countrymen” – the state and the people. He considers whether they will feel “loss” or happiness. Then he balances “the years behind” with the “years to come”, deciding they are both a “waste of breath”. The final line balances “life” and “death”. He seems to feel that his “death” will balance out his “life”.
- \*8. Yes. Both these pilots comment on the “delight” of flying. They both refer to the sense of “tumbling” or “tumult”, suggesting that there are air pockets which cause sudden drops or sudden surges in power as they climb. Both hint that they have done things that few have done.
- \*9. Most war poetry is written from the point of view that war is a serious business, whether one is disillusioned by war (like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon) or determined to fight for one’s country like Rupert Brooke. This poem suggests none of this. It reveals an honest decision to pursue pleasure – the chance to do something one had always wanted to do – rather than anything resembling a war effort. So although it is an elegy, it does not abide within the tradition but focuses purely on the man’s delight in life, rather than his death.

**Maya Angelou “On Aging” (p 6)**

1. One is so much wiser and has so much more experience of life that one doesn't need entertaining or distraction. One can use the memories one has. Mere “chattering” is irritating.
2. “Sympathy” means one feels sorrow or pity about someone's troubles. The persona does not feel she needs someone to be sad about these circumstances.  
“Understanding” is welcomed as it means one recognises what the person is experiencing but does not necessarily do more than acknowledge this.
3. It would suggest that there is nothing left to do. It would suggest retiring into uselessness and giving in to old age.
4. The person admits to getting tired.
5. Life is being celebrated. He/She is old, yes, but still alive and kicking!
- \*6. After stating fairly calmly that he/she is quite comfortable in old age, there is the rush of irritation as people do not seem to accept this and always want to help – and annoy as they do so. The rejection of their annoying concern floods in so the words (and stanzas) tumble into one another.
- \*7. Irritation and the need to convey that one is still feisty and in control of one's life.
- \*8. Yes. The old person comes across as capable and spunky.
- \*9. In stanza 1, it suggests impatiently trying to hold off smothering assistance. In stanza four, it suggests the long list of physical changes taking place and then contrasts excellently with the final defiant shout that life is still precious.
- \*10. No matter how old one is, life is always worth living to the full.
- \*11. The cheerful one – living life to the full.

**Roy Campbell “The Zebras” (p 44)**

1. Colour words: dark”, “golden”, “scarlet”, “sunlight”, “fire”, “flashes”, “gold”, “rosy”, “smoulder”.
2. This poem describes a sunrise scene as the light brings colour back into the world after the dark of night. It is almost as though he focuses on the re-creation of the zebras.
3. Any, provided the explanation and justification is good. For example, “zithering” is a neologism suggesting the reaction on a stringed instrument as one’s fingers caress the strings. Here it is the sun’s rays which caress the stripes on the zebras; “smoulder” means to burn without showing flames, merely giving off smoke. Their breath is visible after the cold of the night and, as the sun catches it, it seems like smoke from an invisible, yet warm, fire etc.
4. He loved the interplay of sunlight on their coats and was caught up in the beauty, the exuberance and the vibrancy of the moment.
- \*5. Any three. There is personification in line 1: “the woods breathe” – a quiet action in contrast with the exuberance of the zebras, but also indicative of Nature being alive.
  - Line 3 – Metaphor as the zebras seem to pull the morning in as though dawn were a chariot.
  - Line 5 – Metaphor – see Question 3.
  - Line 8 – Simile – the light is like a wind touching the strings of a stringed instrument and creating sweet sounds – whether or not there is audible sound is debatable, but there is the same gentle action.
  - Line 10 – Metaphor – see Question 3.
  - Line 13 – Metaphor – The zebra stallion is sleek and functioning like a well-oiled piece of machinery, every aspect harnessed to perform a particular function.
- \*6. The octave seems to focus on the zebras in the light of the dawn, while the sestet focuses on the mood of the animals. Each quatrain is a sentence – the first suggesting the early sunrise, the second the play of light on the animals. The sestet is one long sentence suggesting the exuberant delight in the new day. The strict adherence to the rhyme and rhythm of the sonnet form condenses the energy of the scene.

**Robert Frost “Mending Wall” (p 84)**

1. There are two obvious reasons given – the forces of nature (the frost in winter) which he accepts as inevitable and the hunters, who irritate him by chasing their prey there. However, he implies humorously there is some unknown force which is repulsed by walls and could be demolishing them quietly – a concept he thoroughly agrees with.
2. He puts “Something” at the beginning of the sentence to emphasise it. It catches one’s attention, stands out and makes you wonder who/what this something is “that doesn’t love a wall”.
3. He objects to this particular wall because it is useless. The trees will not encroach [invade] the other property as cattle would do. It is also painful (“we wear our fingers rough”) to maintain. All walls, he suggests keep new ideas out, locking us in with our traditions and not allowing us to consider anything new. We also do not communicate if walls separate us. Walls can give “offence” (e.g. the Berlin Wall) to those locked in and to those excluded.
4. Walls must have a specific function. He asks “Isn’t it where there are cows?” Cows could destroy crops on a neighbour’s field so need to be kept away. Under those circumstances a wall would be valuable.
5. The neighbour likes them because they have always been there! He doesn’t question his father’s ideas but sticks to them narrow-mindedly.
6. Any two references: the apple trees crossing over (line 25); the “spell” they need to keep the wall in place (line 18); his reference to “Oh, just another kind of outdoor game”; and the pun on “frost” which implies he doesn’t like the wall either.
7. Literally the “darkness” is the shadow under the trees in the woods. Figuratively, the “darkness” suggests his blind following of the beliefs and traditions of the past.
8. He compares the neighbour to a “savage” living in the stone age. They are similar in that they both use stones to fight anything which makes them uncomfortable, and they both have primitive ideas and are showing no progress.
9. The wall represents the barriers between people. These are often erected as a result of perceptions rather than reality. Tradition herds people into separate camps, too. The “walls” are maintained because one cannot communicate.
10. The whole poem is really about getting rid of walls, yet ironically the title suggests it is about maintaining them.
- \*11. The ideas on the conflict have already been outlined in all the other questions. Therefore we shall comment only on language use here. The poem is written in blank verse, with speech rhythms and no use of rhyme. This is to suggest the account is being narrated. This is confirmed by the use of the first person pronoun and the fact that we are privy to [told about] his thoughts as well as to what was said aloud. The language is colloquial and little use is made of figurative speech, except in the last lines. There is the underlying metaphor in which the walls are compared with barriers between people.

**Fhazel Johennesse “The Night Train” (p 118)**

1. The narrator is a black (or “coloured”) person in South Africa. We know this because the poem is set in a third-class coach of a train and only people who were not classified as “white” sat there. He makes no attempt to move to another less uncomfortable coach as he is not allowed to upgrade to first or second class.
2. “Off” suggests that the source of fear is located on the train and that getting off would solve the problem. However, there is “darkness outside” as well, and perhaps this would not be enough to get rid of the fear. The narrator desperately wants to move “out” of the circumstances in which he is caged. This would only happen if the regime were toppled or if the speaker left the country. The use of italics here and the isolation of the word emphasise the man’s rising desperation for freedom from fear.
3. The use of “twitch” implies being unable to sit still and to relax. The word is also associated with nervous breakdowns and disorders which are heightened by fear. The “glance” over the shoulder, perhaps, indicates fear of an apartheid spy, even among those “few too few” passengers, and the lack of crowds could mean that there would be little support if there were an attack. The “crossing” of the legs also conveys nervousness as does the “flicking” of the cigarette ash. The very act of smoking could imply a need to calm oneself. The impatient reaction at each station suggests the fear in the face of unwelcome extra risk – the security police or criminals might come into the coach. He cannot focus on anything in the face of his fear and just “stares” through the glass into the darkness.
4. He does not say what he fears but we can deduce that it is either the fear of the conditions under which he lives because of criminals or the fear arising from the repressive society in which he lives, which keeps him constantly at a level of fear – of imprisonment, brutality, death – which makes him unable to relax. This fear is always there as his personification suggests in the last line.
- \*5. The darkness outside conveys that he is not alone in this fear. Anyone travelling on the train is at risk. The fact that there are so few passengers perhaps suggests the restrictions placed on his people as they are afraid to travel. The question in line 11 implies there are others in the same position. The “smell” of fear is not only apparent to him – it seems to be a generally experienced fear.
- \*6. He writes “i” as a small letter – perhaps to convey his insignificance in terms of the laws of the land – but there are no capitals used throughout as this is just thought, not communication with others. The solitary dash in line 4 allows him to show he is not just talking about physical discomforts but that there are more elements to this discomfort to follow in his description. He uses one set of brackets in line 11 to wonder if his is the only face that reflects this fear – this broadens the poem beyond the individual to suggest he speaks for his people. The italics in line 14 emphasise the cry of panic.
- \*7. The lack of stanza, rhyme or rhythm suggests the headlong rush of fear which is overwhelming him. It builds to a crescendo as the poem moves on, not allowing one time to structure one’s thoughts in any other way. The free verse allows him to let the emphasis fall on the single worded line “out” (also – rhymes, etc. would make the poem melodious).
- \*8. As his initial restlessness grows it seems to become a fear which incorporates all the elements of fear in the country – not just a feeling of disquiet on a dangerous journey.

**D.H. Lawrence “Snake” (p 140)**

1. He uses some of the same words in both of these descriptions, e.g. “fissure”, “earth”. The difference is in the verbs. Initially he uses quiet verbs like “reached”, “trailed”, “rested” but these are replaced with verbs like “convulsed”, “writhed” and “was gone”. The initial description alliterates the “s” to suggest the heat and the silence. The details take longer to recount in the first description for the movement is slower and more relaxed, whereas later everything happens quickly and sharply.
2. This suggests the demands of his upbringing, the demands of convention or tradition which most people follow.
3. He grants it equal status with himself, e.g. “I, like a second comer, waiting”. The alliteration recreates the quiet elegance of the snake’s movements – compared with the man in his pyjamas! He uses similes, saying “he had come like a guest”, “like a god” and “like a king”. His final statement is a metaphor, as he calls him “one of the lords of life.”
4. The albatross around the Ancient Mariner’s neck symbolised his guilt and his need to make amends for his deed. Lawrence felt he was guilty of acting rudely and following stupid conventions and that he needed to atone for this in some way.
5. The long lines are reminiscent of a snake, and the free verse allows the poet to imitate its movements as it slithers along. The irregular stanzas enable him to isolate the voices of convention and keep them separate from his own wish to honour the snake. He is also able to isolate key words as at the end of the poem. Generally, the rhythm makes one sense the laziness of a hot day where little moves.
- \*6. Yes. The poet spends a good deal of the poem sketching the picture of the snake so that we see it as almost-human, rather than as a reptile. He uses the descriptions outlined in the answer to Question 3 to suggest its status. On the other hand, he describes his education as “accursed” and says that he “despised” himself. He felt that, in following convention and disturbing and threatening the snake which was doing him no harm, he had revealed that he was rude and “mean”. The suggestion is that humankind is just indulging in knee-jerk reactions.

**Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali “An Abandoned Bundle” (p 156)**

1. An infected sore gives rise to a thick cloud of yellowish pus. This suburb is both an eyesore and a sign that all is not well in society – a society which allows a place like this to exist is sick. It is clouded by mist and smoke from fires which combine into a thick yellow smog, adding to the misery of the people.
2. It is called “White city” but there is nothing crisp and clean about it and nor is it an area where white people live.
3. These dogs have gaping wounds from constantly fighting for food. The red wounds seem like “bandanas” tied around their necks. The image suggests that even the dogs have not got enough to eat. It also conveys a hint of the violence to which the area has to resort to survive.
4. This refers to the young child, Jesus, who was placed in a manger because society did not find a place for him. This baby, too, was not cared for by society. The irony is that Jesus preached about love and caring for one’s neighbour but this so-called Christian society does not obey his message – even though it celebrates his birth.
5. The last verse seems to imply this: the mother’s face shines with “innocence” and her heart is “pure”. However, the fact that the speaker tries to stop the dogs’ attack does suggest that he cannot accept the death of a child like this. Mtshali is directing his criticism at two sets of people: the white powers that allowed such a life to develop and who did not offer solutions, and the many black people who did not respond wisely to their situation. Both the apartheid system and the people must share responsibility.
- \*6. Just as fish are helpless when trapped in a net, these people are trapped in the smog. However, they are also trapped in the conditions of their society which they cannot easily escape from. It is this political, economic and social mess which has “smothered” them and which leads ultimately to this kind of inhumane action.
- \*7. He paints a picture of poverty – “little houses”, “scavenging dogs”, a “rubbish heap” alongside houses. This also suggests an area which leads to illnesses like TB as a result of the smog, and to moral sickness which leads to the “abandoned” child being dumped alive on the heap.
- \*8. He emphasises the innocence, using a gentle metaphor like “melted” as opposed to the dogs that “scurried away”. The face “glittering with innocence” suggests a total lack of concern at the child’s plight, as does the fact that her heart is “pure” despite her murder. These images contrast strongly with the previous horrendous images of blood and disregard for life. By not making the comparisons, Mtshali is allowing readers to respond individually to the situation and is not hammering out a political agenda, although it is there.

**Magoleng Wa Selepe “My Name” (p 188)**

1. Yes, this is a protest as she is protesting against a humiliating disregard for people. Probably, it could have escaped the censor's eye as it seems innocuous enough. It could be dismissed as coming from some woman just getting upset because her unpronounceable name is not used! The censor would not be thinking of the humiliation inflicted on the woman.
2. The protest is about a people's humiliation. While the other inhabitants had the right to use the names given to them by proud parents, the right of the black people was not even regarded. The dismissive attitude of the official reflects the disregard shown to all black people and their traditions. The replacement of the name is just a symbol of what is being done to them in all spheres of society.
3. The ellipses seems to suggest her outrage. She is so angry and shocked that she cannot speak any more at that moment.
4. She is furious: outraged by the insults her people suffer and frustrated that it is done so casually.
- \*5. The fact that he uses Afrikaans is ironic because he uses his own language, whereas the language of her name is disregarded. The “music” of her name contrasts with the gruffness of the Afrikaans expression.
- \*6. She juxtaposes the name of “Maria” with her own names – the two languages and the brevity of the one, as opposed to the length of the other, form an immediate contrast. There is the formality of her speech placed alongside the informal Afrikaans. The juxtaposing of “meaningful” and “trash” in the third stanza contrasts the two opinions of her name and her worth.
- \*7. The longer lines all reflect her words and her name. The shorter lines give the details of the incident. Lines 16 and 17 narrow to form a contrast with the splendour of her own name in the last line.



**F.C. (Francis Carey) Slater “Lament for a Dead Cow” (202)**

1. She was their source of milk for the family. This is a rural family who obviously have no other cow and so have no other source of milk.
2. The cow was like a “black cloud”. Just as the cloud would bring life-giving rain, this cow brought life-giving milk. Now they mourn that the “sky is empty” and no more milk will be forthcoming.
3. They have none of the liquid milk from their cow, but they have the moisture of tears.
4. The ground is baked by the sun, but the cow’s presence seems to bring “comfort” after the heat. Her moo-ing is said to “delight” the hills. Both these verbs suggest a personification. In each instance, she is regarded as pleasant and gentle.
- \*5. Any acceptable story suggesting how the moon became angry and, using its horns, tossed the star to its present position.
- \*6. There are repetitions of phrases (“No more” in lines 12, 14 and 16); the sentences often begin with the subject and do not deviate much from usual word order so that a listener could follow easily. There is repetition of the main ideas, too, so if someone did not get the idea on the first mention, they could hear it later and pick up the sense of the poem. The fact that the images are simple and homely would also make them easy to absorb.
- \*7. This would be a typical rural scene. Cattle were very important to these families and they would mourn the cow’s death. IsiXhosa is also a language which uses a great deal of imagery, just as this lament has done. There are the references to the veld and the kopjes.

**Stephen Spender “My Parents Kept Me from Children Who Were Rough” (p 210)**

1. He was bullied because he was different. He was obviously weaker than these boys whose lives made them tough. He had a lisp and bullies often target a weak point. He was also trying not to be nasty in return but that did not appeal to the others.
2. He reacts with fear of their power (“eared more than tigers”) but he also admires them for their toughness. He would have liked to be friends with them and wanted to be strong like them but they were not interested. There was nothing about him that they admired. This ambiguity runs throughout the poem.
3. Their poverty had made them tough. They had the freedom to “run in the street”, which a well-brought up boy probably did not have. They had the freedom to do dangerous activities and so “climbed cliffs” and swam naked in streams, whereas his parents would have protected him from danger. He admired their quick, hardened bodies which had developed because of their lifestyle.
4. “Salt” stings if it is rubbed into a wound. The word “coarse” is applied to rough gritty, unrefined salt. Their words are unrefined and coarse and hurt him, especially because he realises some of what they say is true. He does have weaknesses.
5. They literally “threw mud” (line 10), but the words they said to him were like stones in that they hurt him. The simile implies these were shouted out as stones would be thrown from a distance.
6. He refers to his fear of them being greater than it would have been for “tigers”. A “tiger” was remote from his life. These boys were right there. The allusion, though, also suggests the ferocity of their attacks and indicates the enormous fear he had. The simile “like dogs” also conveys fear of something one could not guard against because it happened so quickly and unexpectedly, with such force.
- \*7. Line 9 suggests the ambiguity of his thoughts as he admires and fears them in the same instant. The long sentence in lines 3 and 4 suggests breathless admiration for all these boys were able to do.
- \*8. These boys do not smile because this is no game for them. This is how they will face life, fighting against what they cannot have. They do not see any possibility of a relationship with someone who is so removed from their world. He would have liked the contact to develop into friendship so that he can share their toughness but the smile was forced. He did not actually forgive them; the pain they caused was too deep to be forgiven. So the two social classes could not interact. Even in childhood, class distinction was a factor.

### William Wordsworth “The World Is Too Much with Us” (p 231)

1. He feels that people are too concerned with making money and with material goods. We are busy “getting and spending”. This attitude of materialism relates to the word “world”. The word “Nature” suggests the world of beauty which is everywhere around us but with which we have broken ties.
2. We have lost the power to feel this closeness with the natural orderliness of the world. We have also lost the ability to see God in the world.
3. This should express disgust, contempt anger and frustration. The same tone should be used for line 9.
4. The image of the “sea” and the “winds” suggest two sides of nature. First there is the rough nature of the waves – note the harshness of the alliteration of the “b” in line 5 – and the “howling” of the winds. The onomatopoeia of “howling” conveys wild winds. However, there is another side to nature which we are also missing out on. This is the peace of the moonlight on the water and the stillness after the winds have died down – the simile of “sleeping flowers” suggesting utter calm and the alliteration of the “s” conveying this peace.
5. As a “Pagan”, he would be able to appreciate “Nature” because the “Pagans” saw “Nature” and their gods as one. They, therefore, stood in awe of “Nature” and natural phenomena in a way that scientific man does not. He is not against Christianity, simply against a lifestyle that does not relate to “Nature” and, therefore, obstructs a sense of peace.
- \*6. The sestet starts only halfway through line 6 as if he is still amazed at our being out of tune. Abruptly, he declares this is ridiculous. The alliteration of the “G” makes his exclamation stand out, forcefully. The statement that he would “rather be a Pagan” must have shocked his early readers, particularly. The explosive sound of the “P” suggests anger, once again. The anger gradually seems to fade into a sense of sad longing, as he imagines a “Pagan” oneness with “Nature”.
- \*7. This is an Italian sonnet. The octave poses the problem – that we are “out of tune”; the sestet provides an impossible solution! Wordsworth does not really have an answer to give, but instead shows his frustration and his longings with this sestet. The octave intrudes on the sestet as he is carried away with his observation of our attitudes. Then the sestet enforces itself with the cry, “Great God”.
- \*8. It is ironic that these ideas have been around for so long, but man has continued “getting and spending” without any regard to “Nature”. One could list all that man has done to the planet to prove this. Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem, “God’s Grandeur”, picks up the theme as do many other poets, but man is only beginning to wake up now.
- \*9. This catches the essence of the poem, updating it with reference to market places which could include the bazaars as well as the stock-market. We would not hear the conch, but if we did we would ignore it as we have ignored all other signs.



# Whisperings

an anthology of poetry

Malcolm and Morag Venter