

<p><b>A Poison Tree</b>  <b>William Blake</b>  <b>1794</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The speaker is angry with his friend, and with his foe. He tells his friend about his anger, and everything is fine. He keeps his anger from his foe, and the anger grows, eventually killing his foe.</p>
<p><b>Context/About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blake was born, lived and died in London</li> <li>• Was a Romantic poet</li> <li>• Worked as a poet and engraver all his life</li> <li>• Religious, but opposed to the Church as an organisation</li> <li>• Wrote ‘Songs of Innocence’ and ‘Songs of Experience’. Innocence was generally more optimistic, and Experience was cynical. A Poison Tree was published in Songs of Experience</li> <li>• Claimed to see visions of God as a child and later in his life</li> <li>• Supported the French Revolution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poem is written in <b>quatrains</b>, and the metre alternates between <b>iambic</b> and <b>trochaic tetrameter</b></li> <li>- Poem makes <b>allusions</b> to Biblical story of Adam and Eve, and to fairy tales, such as Snow White</li> <li>- Simple language throughout the poem makes it seem as if it is a <b>parable</b> aimed at children</li> <li>- Subject matter is more complex; simple language is deceptive</li> <li>- Speaker does not realise how he has been corrupted by his own anger (“glad I see”)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger – although anger itself is not wrong, the way we deal with it can be harmful to us and others</li> <li>• Deception – the speaker bottles up his feelings, and the foe sneaks into the garden at night. Both actions have devastating consequences</li> <li>• Communication – the speaker communicates with his friend, which ends well; he hides his feelings from his foe, which does not.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>“I was angry” – parallel syntax in first stanza shows how anger can be resolved differently. Two perspectives</p> <p>“sunned it with smiles” – helped the anger to blossom. Sibilance reminds us of a snake – link to Garden of Eden</p> <p>“It grew both day and night” – the anger constantly blossoms. It lives inside him and becomes worse and worse.</p> <p>“Glad I see/My foe outstretched beneath the tree” – The speaker is happy to have caused harm. The anger has changed the speaker, as well as blossoming into a tree.</p>

<h1>The Destruction of Sennacherib</h1> <p>Lord Byron 1815</p>	<p>Summary: The poem recounts a story from the Bible, where Sennacherib, King of Assyria, lays siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah, King of Jerusalem, prays, and in the morning 185,000 Assyrians are found dead in their camp</p>
<p>Context/About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was a Romantic poet</li> <li>• Supported the French Revolution</li> <li>• Became a national hero in Greece after supporting the Greeks in their war for independence</li> <li>• Was known for being rebellious and travelled with a large menagerie of animals</li> <li>• Was widely considered to have been the first celebrity figure</li> <li>• Left England in 1816, following scandal about his alleged affair with his half sister</li> <li>• The poem was written during the Napoleonic Wars. The Assyrians may represent Napoleon's armies. Perhaps Byron is suggesting only a miracle could halt the spread of the French Empire.</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poem is written in <b>quatrains</b></li> <li>- There is a strong rhythm, which mirrors the sound of horses' hooves and sets the pace of the poem</li> <li>- Royal colours of purple and gold, along with aggressive imagery, are used to present the Assyrians as powerful at the start</li> <li>- Contrast is used later in the poem with "silence" and "pale"</li> <li>- Religious imagery – "Angel of Death"</li> <li>- Natural imagery – "summer is green...Autumn hath blown"</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The power of God – God is seen to destroy the Assyrians and protect his chosen people</li> <li>• Nature – Nature is representative of God's power. The natural world is referred to throughout the poem</li> <li>• War – The poem is set during a siege</li> <li>• Death – Death is an inevitable consequence of war</li> </ul>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>"The Assyrian came down like the wolf" – aggressive image. Carnivorous hunting animal used to show the power of Sennacherib and his army</p> <p>"wither'd and strown" – foreshadowing the death of the Assyrians. Contrasts with "summer is green"</p> <p>"for ever grew still!" – God has the power to end them permanently. He has also put an end to any further threats from the Assyrians.</p> <p>"Melted like snow in the glance of the Lord" – the Assyrians are reduced to puddles of water – contrasts with earlier image</p>

<p><b>The Prelude</b>  <b>William Wordsworth</b>  <b>1850</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The poem recounts an incident from Wordsworth's life when, as a young teenager, he 'borrowed' a boat and went sailing on a lake. While out on the lake, he had an encounter with nature that changed him.</p>
<p><b>Context/About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wordsworth was a Romantic poet</li> <li>- His parents died when he was young and he spent a lot of time in nature, which became a huge influence</li> <li>- Wordsworth lived in the Lake District</li> <li>- Was Poet Laureate from 1843-1850</li> <li>- Supported the French Revolution</li> <li>- He was religious</li> <li>- Was very affected by the death of his brother in 1805</li> <li>- Thought negatively of the Industrial Revolution</li> <li>- Began the Prelude in 1805, but it was not published until after his death</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wordsworth uses the form of an <b>epic poem</b>, which traditionally are about heroes. However, his poem is about the life of an ordinary man, reflecting the Romantic belief that we are all important.</li> <li>- At the beginning, there are references to "light" and "sparkling", but after his encounter with the mountain, the language becomes darker. In this way the poem could be a <b>metaphor</b> for growing up and becoming more realistic and less idealised about the world</li> <li>- The poem is in <b>free verse</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <p>Nature – The power of nature is obvious in the poem. The mountain towers above the narrator and he is forever impacted by what he has seen</p> <p>Humanity – The narrator is dwarfed by the enormity of nature. He is completely in awe of what he has seen.</p> <p>Change – The narrator experiences a life-changing event on the lake</p>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>"troubled pleasure" – he refers to his conflicted nature and foreshadows the effects of the encounter</p> <p>"small circles glittering" – the beauty of the lake and of nature itself. Smooth, contained shapes to reflect the ease of stealing the boat.</p> <p>"craggy ridge" – a change in tone. Things are no longer smooth and safe.</p> <p>"a huge peak, black and huge" – repetition of huge suggests he is lost for words; he is awestruck</p> <p>"no familiar shapes remained" – he is forever changed</p>

<h1>The Man He Killed</h1> <p>Thomas Hardy 1902</p>	<p>Summary: The speaker in the poem reflects on the shooting of an enemy soldier, and wonders whether he and the soldier could have been friends had they met in a pub rather than the battlefield.</p>
<p>About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thomas Hardy (not to be confused with Admiral Thomas Hardy) was a novelist and poet from Dorset</li> <li>- He was influenced heavily by Romanticism, particularly Wordsworth and was critical of many aspects of Victorian society</li> <li>- He is famous for his novels which are set in the South-West, and use real places with made-up names.</li> <li>- Hardy was interested in social reform</li> <li>- Hardy was raised Christian, but later began to question the teachings of the church.</li> <li>- Hardy was against the Boer War, which took place in South Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The poem is written in <b>quatrains</b> with an <b>alternating rhyme</b>. This could reflect the two different sides in war, and how they are actually more similar than they seem.</li> <li>- Hardy uses working-class language, such as the <b>colloquial</b> “nipperkin” to suggest that these are ordinary men</li> <li>- The poem is written using speech marks, showing that this is the voice of a soldier</li> <li>- <b>Caesura</b> is used at times to show that the soldier struggles to put his thoughts together</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes:</p> <p>Anti-war message: Hardy was opposed to the Boer War. Neither the speaker nor the enemy soldier are named suggesting they could be anyone.</p> <p>Futility of war: The men cannot give a reason for why they are shooting each other. They are simply following orders.</p> <p>Class: the men who signed up are probably working class, and as such, must simply do as they are told.</p>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>“Had he and I but met” – Hardy is suggesting that the men don’t know anything about each other apart from the fact that they are supposed to be enemies.</p> <p>“I shot at him as he at me”- Similarities drawn between both men. It is not clear which man is from which side. This is deliberate; they are both doing as they are told.</p> <p>“No other reason why” – the soldiers have ended up in this situation despite not really having any strong beliefs. The working classes are sent to war on the whims of those in charge of the country.</p>

# The Charge of the Light Brigade

Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
1854

- About the poet:
- Lord Tennyson was Poet Laureate for much of the Victorian era
  - As Laureate, he had to be supportive of the developing industry in England, but he believed very much in the beauty of nature, and so he was conflicted
  - “Charge of the Light Brigade” is a tribute to the lives lost during a charge made in 1854.
  - A misinterpreted order led the Light Brigade to ride straight into the line of enemy fire
  - As Laureate, Tennyson had to create a sense of the heroism of the soldiers, rather than being outwardly critical of the poor decision-making that led to the tragedy

Key themes:

Conflict – the poem is set during the Crimean War and describes the confusion, terror and heroism of the battle

Courage – the soldiers of the Light Brigade are presented as brave and unwavering throughout

Death – many of the “noble six hundred” died

Duty – there is a sense of patriotic duty, both from those in the army, and those who support them

Summary:  
The poem recounts a charge during the Battle of Balaclava which resulted in the deaths of many soldiers. The charge was the result of a misinterpreted order.

- Language, form and structure
- The poem has a strong **rhythm**, and is written in **dactylic dimeter**, which is reminiscent of the sound of horses’ hooves
  - “noble six hundred” suggests that the Light Brigade are heroes
  - Parallel syntax creates a sense of fear; the Light Brigade have to ride back through the valley to escape
  - Repetition of “six hundred”, and then “not the six hundred” highlights the loss
  - Short final stanza reflects short lives of the dead

Key quotations:

“Half a league, half a league” – repetition suggests forward motion of the charge

“noble six hundred” – always referred to as a collective

“Jaws of Death” – personification highlights level of danger

“Cannon to the right of them...” – they are surrounded by guns

“volleyed and thundered” – sensory imagery to show how overwhelming warfare can be

“When will their glory fade?” – suggests that we must remember them forever

<p>Cousin Kate Christina Rossetti 1860</p>	<p>Summary: This is a narrative poem that tells the story of two cousins who fall in love with a Lord. The Lord rejects the speaker in favour of her cousin, but it is revealed that the speaker has a son, and the cousin does not.</p>
<p>About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rossetti wrote many poems, covering Romantic beliefs and ideals, religious themes and poems for children.</li> <li>- Her brother was Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Rossetti, and she had a link to Lord Byron through their mutual friend John Polidori</li> <li>- She was religious and became deeply involved in the Church of England later in her life</li> <li>- She wrote the words to the Christmas carol 'In the Bleak Midwinter'</li> <li>- She had 3 offers of marriage in her life, but refused them all</li> <li>- She suffered from Graves disease, and eventually died due to recurring breast cancer</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The poem is written in the form of a <b>monologue</b> and directly addresses the narrator's Cousin Kate</li> <li>- The form is a traditional <b>ballad</b>, and it follows a specific rhyme scheme</li> <li>- There are references to nature throughout, suggesting that the narrator lives a simple life as a country girl – perhaps she is unsophisticated</li> <li>- <b>Passive</b> language suggests that the narrator had no choice over what happened to her, either due to being a woman, or being lower in class</li> <li>- <b>Assonance</b> emphasises the sense of sorrow</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes: Romantic conflict – the speaker and her cousin have both fallen in love with the Lord Materialism – the speaker refers to gold and the Lord's wealth, but in the end, the child is the one thing they cannot buy Injustice – despite the Lord being the one to seek out the speaker, she is still thrown aside because he is wealthy and she is not</p>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>"Why did a great lord find me out?" – the repeated question shows the significance. He has changed her life forever</p> <p>"lured me" – makes it sound like a trap</p> <p>"his plaything and his love" – the order of the nouns in this sentence show how the speaker perceives herself – unimportant</p> <p>"bound you with his ring" – Kate has married the lord, and legitimate, but is trapped</p> <p>"my fair-haired son, my shame, my pride" – she is an unmarried mother, but loves her son nevertheless</p>

<p><b>Half-caste</b>  <b>John Agard</b>  <b>1996</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The poem comments on the use of the term ‘half-caste’ to refer to people who have mixed backgrounds. The poet refers to different situations where things are mixed together in a positive way.</p>
<p><b>About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agard was born in 1949 in Guyana</li> <li>- Guyana is country that is on mainland South America but is considered part of the Caribbean</li> <li>- Until 1966, Guyana was under British rule</li> <li>- Agard moved to the UK in the 1970s with his partner Grace Nichols (who is also a poet)</li> <li>- Agard is mixed-race, with a Caribbean father and a Portuguese mother.</li> <li>- When he moved to Britain, he found he was referred to as “half-caste”, which angered him.</li> <li>- Agard has been writing poetry since he was 16.</li> <li>- He uses Creole, which is a mix of English and a more Caribbean way of speaking. He does this intentionally in many of his poems</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The poem is written in a <b>Creole dialect</b>, which echoes the mix of cultures that make up a person who is “half-caste”.</li> <li>- Agard refers to “Picasso” and “Tchaikovsky”, highlighting the fact that without mixing, art and music would not exist</li> <li>- Humour is used, referring to the “overcast” English weather</li> <li>- The metaphorical “whole” at the end of the poem suggests that a person who sees another as “half” is closed-minded</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <p>Race – Agard himself is from a mixed background, and from a country that was once a British colony. In the poem he expresses anger at those from mixed backgrounds being seen as lesser, or half.</p> <p>Identity – Agard comments on the difficulty a person might have if they are not “one thing”</p> <p>Confrontation – Agard’s poem speaks directly to those who use the term: “Explain yusef”</p>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>“Excuse me” – sarcastic tone at the start of the poem,</p> <p>“Explain yusef” – repeated throughout the poem. Agard is challenging anyone who would use the term “half-caste”.</p> <p>“Ah rass” – a Creole term used in anger. There is a build up to this point in the poem, and this is a cry of emotion</p> <p>“half my ear” – again sarcastic, but also accusatory, highlighting how ridiculous it is to call somebody “half” of anything</p> <p>“whole of yu mind” – suggesting there is more to learn about a person than their race</p>

<p><b>Exposure</b>  <b>Wilfred Owen</b>  <b>1917</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The poem tells the story of WW1 soldiers who are in the trenches, waiting for something to happen. In the poem, nature is as dangerous as the enemy soldiers and the men think of home.</p>
<p><b>About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owen was a WW1 soldier</li> <li>- He was injured and sent to Craiglockhart Hospital during the war</li> <li>- Despite being anti-war, his patriotism and support for the soldiers fighting in the trenches meant that he returned to the front line.</li> <li>- His friend and mentor, fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon, threatened to stab him in the leg if he returned to battle</li> <li>- Owen was killed in France on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1918, a week before the end of the war</li> <li>- Owen is widely thought of as one of the greatest poets of the First World War, focusing on “the pity of war” in much of his work</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owen uses <b>repetition</b> in the poem to create a sense of the <b>monotony</b> of life in the trenches, repeatedly telling us that “nothing happens.”</li> <li>- The use of <b>sibilance</b> in the first line could reflect the sounds of shells, but also the wind, showing the two different dangers the soldiers faced</li> <li>- Written from a <b>first-person plural</b> perspective, highlighting the communal experience of the soldiers in the trenches</li> <li>- Owen uses <b>half rhymes</b>, which create an uneasy tone for the reader</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <p>Futility of war – the soldiers wait in the trenches for nothing to happen. Owen’s letters from the trenches show that this reflected the truth of trench warfare.</p> <p>The power of nature – Nature is personified in the poem and is as much of a danger to the men as the war that they are fighting</p> <p>Conflict – the poem is written from the trenches</p>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>“iced east winds that knife us” – the weather is personified. The sibilance reflects the sounds of the shells, and the verb “knife” suggests a deliberate action.</p> <p>“But nothing happens” – the repetition of this line highlights the futility of war. The soldiers never get anywhere.</p> <p>“war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag” – Owen compares war and nature. There is a sense of inevitability with both. He uses negative imagery when describing nature to show the emotions of the soldiers – pathetic fallacy. The clouds and rain could also be symbols of the sadness and pain they feel.</p>

<p>Catrin Gillian Clarke 1978</p>	<p>Summary: The poem details the relationship between the speaker and her daughter. The speaker refers to the birth of her daughter and a confrontation between the two of them years later.</p>
<p>About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Born in 1937 in Wales</li> <li>- Often writes about Welsh mythology</li> <li>- Comments on nature and people in her work</li> <li>- Taught creative writing in schools</li> <li>- Has a daughter (Catrin) and two sons</li> <li>- Decided to write about her own relationship with her daughter</li> <li>- She was the National Poet for Wales from 2008-2016</li> <li>- On her website, she offers advice and notes for many of her poems, and has this to say to students: Understanding the poem is down to you. Once you have an idea, write it down, and quote your proof. If the evidence is there, in the language, you can't be wrong.</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Written in two <b>stanzas</b> to reflect two different confrontations – the birth, and a teenage argument</li> <li>- Pause between the stanzas with end-stopped line suggests that time has passed – approximately 13 years.</li> <li>- Name “Catrin” used at the start, but then not again. Perhaps this suggests it could be any mother/daughter</li> <li>- Poem shifts from past to present tense, indicating that the tension between them will always exist</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes:</p> <p>Mother/daughter conflict – this poem could apply to any parent/child relationship. Clarke says “why did my beautiful baby have to grow up?”</p> <p>Conflicted emotions – letting go of a child is a difficult thing to do; how does a parent know when to loosen the reins, and when to hold them back?</p> <p>Love – the mother loves her daughter</p>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>“white”/“disinfected”/“glass tank” – sterile images of the hospital, perhaps reflecting the universality of the birth experience, and the blank canvas of their relationship</p> <p>“traffic lights” – a seemingly innocuous detail; this event is going to change the course of her life like cars at traffic lights</p> <p>“red rope of love” – umbilical cord. Red to contrast “white” hospital; red the colour of love, violence and passion</p> <p>“fought over”/“struggle”/“fighting” – images of conflict right from birth.</p> <p>“In the dark” – mother cannot follow daughter through life</p>

<p><b>War Photographer</b>  <b>Carole Satyamurti</b>  <b>1987</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The poem focuses on the tragedy of war, using poverty as a comparison. The poem discusses the idea that whilst war photography is truthful, it is in some way manipulated before seen by the public.</p>
<p><b>About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carole Satyamurti was born in 1939</li> <li>- She was born in Kent, where she grew up. In her adult life, she has lived in North America, Singapore and Uganda, and now lives in London.</li> <li>- She wrote a retelling of the Mahabharata, an Indian text.</li> <li>- Satyamurti is a sociologist as well as a poet and translator</li> <li>- She does not shy away from difficult subjects in her poetry, as this poem shows, and has also written on topics such as cancer</li> <li>- At the time she wrote the poem, there were several wars occurring: the Gulf War, the Afghan/Russian war, and a Ugandan civil war</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First stanza discusses the nature of photography and how it captures just one moment, not the whole picture</li> <li>- There is the contrast of the “sun-gilded girls” at Ascot and the “small girl” in the war zone</li> <li>- No specific war zone is mentioned, which highlights that this should be a universal experience</li> <li>- The poem ends with a photograph – the first and last stanzas may mirror the “edges” or the “frame” around a pictures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <p>Inequality – the poem features two images, one of young women at Ascot, and another of a young girl with a baby in a war zone. This highlights the differences in the way people live their lives</p> <p>War – the poem looks at the way war is experienced by those living it and those seeing it second-hand</p> <p>Western attitudes – Do we really understand war?</p>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>“frame”/“edges” – photographs are limited in what they can show us</p> <p>“sun-gilded girls” – the use of the word “girls” here may suggest an immaturity. There is an implied luxury in remaining a “girl” and drinking “champagne”</p> <p>“small girl” – here the word emphasises how young and small she is. Everyone is impacted when war strikes</p> <p>“burden” – holding the baby will slow her down. There is a brutality that we don’t see in war images</p> <p>“arbitrary” – random. This could be any of us</p>

<p><b>Belfast Confetti</b>  <b>Ciaran Carson</b>  <b>1990</b></p>	<p><b>Summary:</b>  The poem describes an act of violence during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. The poem uses punctuation marks as metaphors for the various aspects of war.</p>
<p><b>About the poet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ciaran Carson was born in 1948</li> <li>- He is from Northern Ireland, and lived there during the Troubles from 1968-1998</li> <li>- The Troubles was a conflict between Unionists, who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Irish nationalists, who wanted Northern Ireland to leave the UK</li> <li>- Although not strictly a religious conflict, most Unionists were Protestant, and most nationalists were Catholic, leading people to see the conflict as one between Catholic and Protestant Christians.</li> <li>- “Ciaran” is a Catholic name, and “Carson” a Protestant one; the poet’s own identity is symbolic of his living within a divided Northern Ireland</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language, form and structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long lines perhaps suggest a difficulty finding an end to the confusion and danger after an explosion</li> <li>- Use of punctuation to represent aspects of war suggests that language is important, but perhaps it has become used as a weapon, instead of people talking together to find peace</li> <li>- Streets are named after events in warfare, suggesting violence is part of the identity of the city</li> <li>- Caesura highlights the difficulty the poet has in forming his ideas – this represents his confusion</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key themes:</b></p> <p>War – the poem is set during the aftermath of an explosion</p> <p>Psychological conflict – there is a sense in the poem of the confusion that can follow a bomb exploding</p> <p>Language – the poet uses punctuation marks to represent the falling debris after the bomb</p> <p>Identity – the poet struggles to find who he is, feeling as though he is part of both groups</p>	<p><b>Key quotations:</b></p> <p>“Suddenly” – this tells us that the explosion was a surprise and that people are living in constant fear of violence</p> <p>“blocked with stops and colons” – the poet cannot escape the violence, physically or metaphorically.</p> <p>“I know this labyrinth so well” – a labyrinth is a confusing maze. There is a juxtaposition when he says he knows it well. Perhaps he is suggesting that outsiders cannot understand the situation</p> <p>“A fusillade of question marks” – he does not know who he is, and struggles to find his identity</p>

<h1>The Class Game</h1> <h2>Mary Casey</h2> <h3>1981</h3>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>The poem challenges the reader to think about the 'game' of judging others based on social class. The 'game' is an ironic reference to something that is actually quite serious and potentially harmful.</p>
<p>About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not much is known about Mary Casey, other than she was a housewife from Liverpool</li> <li>- The poem is a criticism of the British class system, which is broadly divided into Upper, Middle and Lower/Working classes</li> <li>- At the time when the poem was written, there was a large divide between the wealthy and the poor</li> <li>- Although some would argue that divide has become smaller, others would suggest the opposite</li> <li>- The poem attacks stereotypes of working class people, but there is also a sense of resentment towards the middle class</li> <li>- The poem is written in Liverpudlian dialect, not the standard 'BBC English' of the middle classes</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The poem is a <b>dramatic monologue</b> that comes from a speaker who has been made angry through the inequality in society</li> <li>- The poem is written in the poet's own <b>dialect</b></li> <li>- There is a burst of emotion – "Well, mate!" – that suggests the poet has had enough of being stereotyped</li> <li>- The speaker appears to be judging the middle/upper classes – "Bye Mummy dear"</li> <li>- The poem refers to typically working class jobs – "cleaner", "docker".</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes:</p> <p>Inequality – the poem attacks the idea of "haves" and "have nots" – where a person is from should not affect the chances they have in life</p> <p>Segregated society/resentment – by creating division between social classes, there is also a resentment that passes both ways</p> <p>Pride in one's roots – the poet/speaker is fiercely proud of their working-class background</p>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>"Tara"/"Ma"/"Bye Mummy Dear" – contrast between the speech of the speaker and the person they are addressing</p> <p>"How can you tell what class I'm from?" – refrain. Repeated throughout the poem to challenge those who make judgments based on the way people speak</p> <p>"Well, mate!" – a burst of emotion that suggest the speaker's frustrations have spilled out of them</p> <p>"I'm proud of the class that I come from" – at the end of the poem, a single line does not rhyme and stands out as a point of defiance</p>

**Poppies**  
**Jane Weir**  
**2005**

- About the poet:
- Jane Weir was born in 1963.
  - Her mother is English and her father Italian.
  - During the 1990s, she lived in Northern Island, and experienced the Troubles
  - Weir runs her own textile business, and references to this can be seen in the poem
  - Weir was asked to write a poem by the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, in 2005 while British troops were still in Iraq and Afghanistan
  - Weir wanted to write from a woman's perspective as many war poems are written by men
  - 'Poppies' makes reference to Armistice Day, and the idea of wearing poppies to remember those who have died in war

Key themes:

War: There are references to poppies in the title and in the poem itself. Armistice Sunday is referred to.

Grief: the mother grieves the lost childhood of her son, and she also grieves the possible death of her son

Mother/son relationship: The mother looks back at her son growing up and the distance between them

Summary:  
The poem is written from the perspective of a mother whose son has gone to war. The mother reflects on her son growing up, and at the end we are uncertain if he is alive or dead.

- Language, form and structure
- The poem shifts in time. We see the mother on Armistice Sunday, then she remembers her son at various stages of growing up, and finally ends in the present
  - Caesura and enjambement are used throughout to represent the difficulty the mother is having controlling her emotions
  - When the mother "released a song bird" she is referring to allowing her son to be free to make his own way in the world
  - Imagery of fabric used to create a sense of closeness between the mother and son; she remembers being in physical contact with him
  - Reference to the "playground voice" shows she is grieving her little boy, as well as his possible death

Key quotations:

"Poppies had already been placed" – there is a suggestion that grief is a collective emotion and it is important enough to be remembered regularly

"spasms of paper red" – the colour has an association with blood and violence

"steemed the softening of my face" – sibilance creates a sense of softness. The mother is trying to be strong for her son

"leaned against it like a wishbone" – wishbones are fragile; the mother is easily broken

# No Problem

## Benjamin Zephaniah

1996

- About the poet:
- Benjamin Zephaniah was born to a postman from Barbados and a Jamaican nurse in a part of Birmingham he refers to as “the Jamaican capital of Europe.”
  - He was offered an OBE in 2005 and turned it down, because the word “Empire” reminds him of slavery and oppression
  - He left school at 13, unable to read or write, and has since taught himself
  - He is a dub poet. Dub poetry originated in Jamaica and has a musical quality to it. It is designed to be performed, and often has an exaggerated rhythm.
  - Zephaniah follows the Rastafarian religion, which is outside of ‘typical’ English culture

Key themes:

Racism – there is discussion in the poem of the stereotypes many black people face in England. The poet uses sarcastic humour at the end to highlight the problem of classifying people by race

Inequality – the poem highlights the different expectations that are sometimes placed on black people. For example, expecting them to be good at sports, rather than academic.

Summary:

The poem challenges the issues of racism and stereotyping. The poet considers various different prejudices and how he has had to deal with them, as well as how others have dealt with them.

- Language, form and structure
- The poem is written in two stanzas. The first, longer stanza, discusses some of the problems that young black people face when they are stereotyped in English society
  - He uses an ABAB structure, but the B rhymes are more clear. This could suggest he is drawing attention to those particular words.
  - He uses a humorous tone, particularly at the end, echoing a phrase many people use when they are trying not to appear racist
  - He attacks racism in this poem

Key quotations:

“I am not de problem” – the poet is suggesting that there is an issue with society

“branded” – the verb suggests he has had the identity of an athlete thrust upon him. The verb also has connotations of slavery, as slaves were branded with hot metal.

“pigeon hole” – he suggests that he has been stereotyped, this could also link to Pidgin English, which is a Creole language

“Sum of me best friends are white” – a sarcastic, humorous end to the poem

<h1>What Were They Like?</h1> <h2>Denise Levertov</h2> <h3>1967</h3>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>The poem uses a question-and-answer format to discuss the devastation of the Vietnamese people following the Vietnam War. The poem focuses on the consequences of conflict and the losses suffered.</p>
<p>About the poet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Denise Levertov was an American poet, but she was born in 1927 in Ilford, Essex</li> <li>- Levertov's father was Russian, and she considered herself to be "part Jewish, German, English and Welsh", which caused her to be confused about her identity</li> <li>- She was a civilian nurse during the Blitz, and met and married an American after the War. She moved to America and became a citizen in 1955.</li> <li>- Her father was Jewish, but converted to Christianity and Levertov always felt that her culture and religion were important parts of her identity. She converted to Christianity in 1984.</li> <li>- She died in 1997</li> </ul>	<p>Language, form and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The poem uses a question and answer format to explore the effects of war on Vietnamese culture</li> <li>- There is natural imager (buds/blossom/rice) to highlight how the Vietnamese people lived in harmony with nature</li> <li>- The juxtaposition of nature and conflict (killed/burned/charred/smashed) highlights the impact of war on civilians</li> <li>- References to singing and silence show how the Vietnamese people have experienced a loss of innocence following the war</li> </ul>
<p>Key themes:</p> <p>Cultural identity – the poem concerns itself with the culture of the Vietnamese people, following the Vietnam War</p> <p>War – the poem looks at the impact of violence and conflict on the people of Vietnam</p> <p>Injustice – Levertov was opposed to the Vietnam War and uses a question and answer format to highlight what she considered crimes</p>	<p>Key quotations:</p> <p>"Did"/"Were"/"Had" – the questions are asked in past tense, suggesting that the culture of Vietnam no longer exists</p> <p>"quiet laughter" – suggestions of the Vietnamese people living a peaceful and unobtrusive existence</p> <p>"It is not remembered" – no one exists who can answer this question – everyone has been killed in the conflict</p> <p>"burned mouth" – literally, laughter would hurt someone with burns. Metaphorically, there is nothing to laugh about now that the country has been destroyed</p> <p>"Silent" – ends on a serious/poignant note</p>