

English Literature GCSE
Poetry Anthology: Conflict
Revision Guide



Name: _____

Form: _____

English Teacher: _____



'War Photographer' by Carole Satyamurti (1987)

Key quotations

'People eat, sleep, love normally /
while I seek out the tragic'

'I took a pair of peach, sun-gilded
girls / rolling, silk-crumpled, on the
grass / in champagne giggles'

'a small girl / staggering down
some devastated street'

'my finger pressed'

'the first bomb of the morning /
shattered the stones'

'mouth too small for her dark
scream'

'Their caption read / 'Even in hell
the human spirit / triumphs over
all'

'As arbitrary as a blood stain on
the wall.'

Language, structure, form

The photographer is presented as a predator
through 'seek out', 'finger pressed'.

Contrast of stanzas 2 and 3 – lightness vs.
heavy burden – emphasises inequality

Sibilance in stanza 2 suggests lighthearted
giggling, while in stanza 3 it suggests how
sinister and evil war is.

Repetition of '- as' suggests no difference
between two events.

Ellipsis in stanza 3 emphasises we don't
know fate of baby.

Caesura after 'the almost-smile' suggests
happiness cut short.

We learn about what happened to the girl
before we hear what the newspaper
published.

Dramatic monologue, first person – first
stanza is present tense as if photographer is
confessing and then moves to past tense
when remembering his/her crimes.

Context: A British poet (born 1939) who now lives in London after many jobs abroad, including North America, Singapore and Uganda. She is a [sociologist](#) with an interest in social processes and the stories people tell about themselves. This poem was first published in a collection of poems called *Broken Moon* in 1987, when there were a number of conflicts around the world. It was later republished in a collection called *Stitching The Dark* in 2005, while the poem is not about a particular war, it's interesting to consider that this was when the Iraq war was happening.

Poems to compare it with: Belfast Confetti, What Were They Like?,
Exposure, The Charge of the Light Brigade.



'Belfast Confetti' by Ciaran Carson (1990)

Key quotations

'It was raining exclamation marks'

'a fount of broken type'

'an asterisk on the map'

'This hyphenated line, a burst /
of rapid fire...'

'All the alleyways and side
streets blocked with stops and
/ colons.'

'I know this labyrinth so well'

'Crimea / street. Dead end
again.'

'What is / my name? Where
am I coming from? Where am I
going? A / fusillade of question
marks.'

Language, structure, form

Extended metaphor of punctuation represents the war-torn streets, suggesting conflict has left speaker speechless.

Punctuation represents events and damage – 'raining exclamation marks' is shouting, 'asterisk on the map' looks like exploding bomb, also suggests something missing. 'hyphenated line' and '...' represents bullets.

Assonance of 'blocked with stops...' emphasises feelings of being trapped.

Metaphor 'labyrinth', refers to the Minotaur myth, suggests how trapped he feels and that his home has become unreal.

Lines are interrupted by enjambment and caesura – representing the chaos of the streets, and dead ends speaker faces e.g. 'street. Dead end again.'

Poem is structured on the page with long then short lines representing the dead ends the speaker faces; also represents lines of bullet fire.

Rhetorical questions at end represent questions police are firing at him and also suggest the conflict has left the speaker with a lack of identity.

Context: Ciaran Carson is a Northern Irish poet, born in 1948. This poem is written about The Troubles in Northern Ireland from 1968-1998. The conflict occurred between the Protestants and the Catholics, with the Protestants wanting to remain part of the United Kingdom, while the Catholics were fighting for independence from the UK. The conflict happened on the streets of Belfast, turning the city and other areas in Northern Ireland into a conflict zone. Thousands of people were killed and injured over the three decades. Belfast Confetti was the name given to home-made bombs which included various metal items, such as nails, nuts and bolts and car keys. Carson himself felt confused about his identity during The Troubles, as his identity is both Protestant and Catholic – Ciaran is a Catholic name while Carson is Protestant.

Poems to compare it with: War Photographer, What Were They Like?, Exposure, The Charge of the Light Brigade.



'What Were They Like?' by Denise Levertov (1967)

Key Quotations

'1) Did the people of Viet Nam/ use lanterns of stone?'

'1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.'

'Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.'

'When bombs smashed those mirrors/ there was time only to scream'

'Who can say? It is silent now.'

Key language, form and structure points

Broken structure of the poem with questions and answers, perhaps reflects the broken nature of the Vietnamese culture.

The patronising language in the opening stanza is distorted into the pain of the Vietnamese experience in the second stanza.

Both persona are not from Vietnamese culture – they are 'other' and different, referred to by "they".

Past tense – "What were they like?"

Images of beauty juxtaposed with destruction.

Context

The Vietnamese War was a war between America and Vietnam during the 60s and 70s, which is considered to be one of the great failures of American foreign policy. In attempting to defeat the spread of communism, America was at war with the people of Vietnam and had a lot of atrocities happen throughout the war.

Particularly notable was the use of napalm bombs, which caused incredible pain and burning to civilians. Blanket bombing across Vietnam utterly destroyed the agriculture and cities of the region in a war that most Vietnamese people did not have an opinion about other than wishing to end.

Poems to compare it with: 'Destruction of Sennacherib', 'Belfast Confetti', 'The Man He Killed', 'Exposure'

'A Poison Tree' by William Blake

(1794)



Key Quotations

I was **angry** with my foe:/ I told it
not, my wrath did grow.'

'And I water'd it in fears./ Night and
morning with my tears'

'And it grew both day and night,/ Till
it bore an **apple bright**;

'And he knew that it was mine,/ And
into my garden **stole**'

'In the morning glad I see,
My **foe** outstretch'd beneath the
tree.'

Key language, form and structure points

First-person narrative: examining a basic human emotion which can be felt by anyone.

An **extended metaphor** of a tree growing in the speaker's garden demonstrates how the anger continues to grow.

A Poison Tree is written in **quatrains**.

Each stanza consists of a pair of **rhyming couplets** in the regular repeated pattern **aabb**.

The rhythm of the poem is also straightforward and regular (**trochaic trimeter and iambic tetrameter**).

Context

Blake was part of the early Romantic Movement, which included poets such as Lord Byron and William Wordsworth (both also featured in the 'Conflict' collection).

Blake's work often protested against social injustices and the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution.

'A Poison Tree' is taken from his collection of poetry, *Songs of Experience*, which often presents the world as harmful, cynical and exploitative, especially of young children. Blake once claimed that his ideal reader was a child.

Poems to compare it with: 'Destruction of Sennacherib', 'A Poison Tree' 'The Man He Killed'

'Cousin Kate' by Christina Rossetti

(1860)



Key Quotations

"Why did the great lord find me out/
And praise my flaxen hair?"

"He wore me like a golden knot"

"He saw you at your father's gate,
/ Chose you and cast me by."

"Call me outcast thing."

"You sit in gold and sing"

"O Cousin Kate, my love was true, /
Your love was writ in sand"

"My fair-haired son, my shame, my
pride, / Cling closer, closer yet"

Key language, form and structure points

- The poem is a [monologue](#), directly addressed to "Cousin Kate"
- Traditional ballad (ABAB rhyme scheme) alternating lines of iambic trimeter and tetrameter
- Images are pastoral in nature
- Rhetorical questions / oxymorons – convey speaker's confusion
- Passive verbs emphasise the powerlessness of women - the speaker and Cousin Kate are passive whereas the nobleman is active

Context

Christina Rossetti was a well-known British poet of the nineteenth century. She was born in London in 1830 to Italian parents, and grew up with her sister and two brothers (one brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, became a famous painter). Rossetti suffered from bouts of depression throughout her life, and was deeply religious - many of her poems are devotional, and she became involved in the Anglo-Catholic movement. She wrote poetry from her early teens, and was published in literary magazines from the start of the 1850s. Her most famous collection is 'Goblin Market and Other Poems,' which was published in 1862. Critics have paid particular attention to the themes of repression, sexuality and gender in Rossetti's work. Whilst Rossetti herself never married, it is interesting to note in relation to this poem that Rossetti volunteered at the St Mary Magdalene 'House of Charity' for 'fallen women' (prostitutes, single mothers etc) from 1859 until 1870; this experience may have caused her to become interested in 'fallen women' and their stories.

Poems to compare it with: *'Catrin'*, *'The Class Game'*, *'A Poison Tree'*



'Poppies' by Jane Weir (2005)

Key Quotations

"Three days before Armistice Sunday/ and poppies had already been placed/ on individual war graves"

"crimped petals,/ spasms of paper red"

"to the front door, threw/ it open, the world overflowing/ like a treasure chest."

"released a song bird from its cage."

"the war memorial,/ leaned against it like a wishbone."

"I listened, hoping to hear/ your playground voice catching on the wind."

Key language, form and structure points

Different time phrases give it a sense of universality: "three days before", "after you'd gone" – it ends with her suspended on the hill between past and present.

Balanced and regular stanzas are disrupted by caesura and enjambment: reflects the mother trying to control her emotion.

Poetic persona of a mother grieving for her son for has either died or is fighting in a war.

Imagery of birds and doves give a sense of freedom.

Moving details of motherly love.

Context

The poem is set in the present day but reaches right back to the beginning of the Poppy Day tradition. Armistice Sunday began as a way of marking the end of the First World War in 1918. It was set up so people could remember the hundreds and thousands of ordinary men who had been killed in the First World War. Today, the event is used to remember soldiers of all wars who have died since then. When *Poppies* was written, British soldiers were still dying in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a way of trying to understand the suffering that deaths caused, the *poet laureate* Carol Ann Duffy asked a number of writers to compose poems, including Jane Weir.

Poems to compare it with: '*Catrin*', '*Exposure*', '*The Charge of the Light Brigade*', '*Poppies*', '*What Were They Like*'



'The Destruction of Sennacherib' by Lord Byron (1815)

Key Quotations

"The Assyrian came down like the
wolf on the fold/ And his cohorts
were gleaming in purple and gold"

"the sheen of their spears was like
stars on the sea"

"For the Angel of Death spread his
wings on the blast"

"the tents were all silent, the
banners alone/ the lances unlifted,
the trumpet unblown."

"And the widows of Ashur are loud
in their wail... And the idols are
broke... "

"The might of the Gentile... Hath
melted like snow in the glance of
the Lord."

Key language, form and structure points

Anapestic meter – di di DUM di di
DUM – sounds like the horses
hooves, getting out of control.

Strict quatrains with couplets
(AABB) rhyme scheme – simple
truth – like a bible story.

Long list structure – "And... And...
And..." events overwhelming.

Natural imagery to make the
biblical story seem like a fable/
parable "like a wolf on the fold"

Sensuous imagery throughout –
emphasising wealth and glamour of
invaders "purple and gold", "stars
on the sea."

Context

Based on a biblical story where the king of Assyrians, led by Sennacherib, try to invade Jerusalem but are defeated by the religious forces there. Demonstrates that the Jews/ Christians are blessed by God. Byron was a Romantic Poet who was very interested in travelling to the Orient and was fascinated by their exotic lifestyles. Byron was one of the most notorious men in England: "mad, bad and dangerous to know" and often is unconventional in his approaches. Typical of Romanticism is the way he describes images using natural imagery and a sense of wider forces controlling individual lives.

Poems to compare it with: *'Exposure'*, *'The Charge of the Light Brigade'*, *'Poppies'*, *'What Were They Like'*

'The Class Game' by Mary Casey

(1981)



Key Quotations

“How can you tell what class I’m from?”

“‘Cos we live in a corpy, not like some/ In a pretty little semi, out of Wirral way”

“A cleaner is me mother/ A docker is me brother”

“And I’m proud of the class that I am from.”

Key language, form and structure points

- Direct address. A challenge? A game?
- Rhetorical questions – accusing tone?
- Dialect used to show she is not living up to the view of her.
- Rhyme is AABB sing song teasing tone.

Context

The Class Game was completed in 1981, two years after the Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. She felt that British manufacturing industry had become uncompetitive and saw the cause as weak employers and overly strong trades unions who were, she felt, only too willing to call their members out on strike.

She reduced the powers of the workers’ unions and privatised (‘sold off’) many publicly owned companies. She closed many uncompetitive coal mines, too. A short-term result was that Britain suffered an economic downturn and unemployment soared. This particularly affected industrialised working-class areas in the north of the country and Mary Casey would have seen this first hand in her home city. Liverpool’s famous docks, a traditional source of local employment, were allowed to run down and thousands of households fell into poverty; crime levels increased; housing was allowed to deteriorate and illegal drug use became more common.

Poems to compare it with: *‘Half-Caste’*, *‘No Problem’*

'Extract from The Prelude' by William Wordsworth (1850)

COME FORTH
INTO THE LIGHT
OF THINGS, LET
NATURE BE
YOUR TEACHER.

William Wordsworth



Key Quotations

"One summer evening (led by her)"

"Went heaving though the water like a swan;"

"a huge peak, black and huge"

"the grim shape/ Towered up between me and the stars"

"But huge and mighty forms...were a trouble to my dreams"

Key language, form and structure points

- Blank verse (iambic pentameter with no rhyme) like a narrative
- Part of an epic poem
- Conversational tone
- Images of Nature having authority over man.
- Nature as beautiful and also dangerous.

Context

Wordsworth was an early Romantic poet. This is a movement/idea which focuses on feeling and emotion over logic and thought.

The imagination was elevated to a position as the **supreme faculty of the mind**. This contrasted with the traditional arguments for the importance of reason.

The Romantics tended to present the imagination as a **dynamic and active power**.

Imagination was viewed as the power for creating all art.

"Nature" was celebrated and was often presented as itself a work of art, constructed by a divine imagination.

Poems to compare it with: 'Destruction of Sennacherib', 'A Poison Tree' 'Exposure'

'Exposure' by Wilfred Owen (1917)



Key Quotations

"But nothing happens"

"Is it that we are dying?"

"Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war."

"Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence."

"The merciless iced east winds that knife us."

"For the love of God seems dying."

"All their eyes are ice."

"We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy."

Key Language, Form and Structure Points

8 Stanzas of 5 lines – Last line of each stanza is significantly shorter

ABBA rhyme scheme for first four lines

Generally follows Hexameter

Repeated use of rhetorical questions

Repetition of "But nothing happens"

Personification of the weather – is this the real enemy?

Various forms of alliteration (Assonance, sibilance...)

Context

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) is one of the most famous English poets to emerge from the First World War. He was born on the borders of England and Wales and was interested in becoming a poet from an early age.

War broke out in 1914 and he joined the army the following year, aged 18. Before long he had to return to England to get treatment for shell-shock (what today we would call Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – severe anxiety brought on by a stressful situation like war).

He was sent to a hospital in Edinburgh and there he met the already well-known poet and writer Siegfried Sassoon. Owen returned to the trenches a year later and wrote some of his best-known poems. He was also decorated for his courage in battle, before being killed on 4th November 1918, just a week before peace was declared and the war finally ended.

Poems to compare it with: *The Man he Killed, The Charge of the Light Brigade, Poppies, Belfast Confetti, War Photographer.*

'Half Caste' by John Agard (1996)

Key language, form and structure points

- The poem is written in a mixture of English dialects; Standard English, Caribbean and Creole forms are all used.
- Structured with short lines and almost no punctuation (he uses '/' instead of a full stop) to convey the direct and confrontational nature of the message. It makes the poem go quickly so it feels like someone 'kicking off' at you - pouring out his feelings at the reader.
- The poem does not rhyme, but the words *do* have a rhythm which is reinforced by the repetition of phrases like: 'Wha yu mean' and: 'de whole of'.
- Direct address, imperative: "Explain yusef" challenges the reader and their presumed prejudice.
- Extended metaphor of 'half' a person, Agard making a point about ideas of purity, equating mixed race with 'less than whole'.
- The poem relies on *comparisons* to make us see how illogical it is to judge things that are in contrasting colours as only 'half' worthy. Imagery of Picasso, Tchaikovsky, British weather – examples valued by white culture, mixing seen as positive and creating something beautiful.

Context

John Agard was born in Guyana in 1949, with a Caribbean father and a Portuguese mother (he is of mixed race). In 1977, he moved to Britain, where he became angry with people who referred to him as 'half-caste'. Realising that most people who say this do so without thinking about what it really means, he tells off people who use this term without thinking.

Agard has said that when he wrote the poem he was thinking about 'Half-caste'; 'half-blood'; 'half-breed, and that these terms and the people they were directed at represented 'purity being subverted'. He stated that 'People feel comfortable with "purity", but [racial mixing] should be seen not as something threatening but something enriching'.

Key Quotations

"yu mean when picasso
mix red an green
is a half caste canvas/"

"Ah listening to yu wid de keen
half of mih ear"

"I half-caste human being
cast half a shadow"

"but yu must come back tomorrow
wid de whole of yu eye"

"an I will tell yu
de other half
of my story"

Poems to compare it with: *The Class*
Game, No Problem

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1854)



Key Quotations

"Half a league, half a league, half a league onward."

"Into the valley of Death rode the six hundred."

"Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die."

"Cannon to the right of them, cannon to the left of them, cannon in front of them."

"Stormed at with shot and shell."

"When can their glory fade?"

"Honour the charge they made! Honour the Light Brigade."

Key Language, Form and Structure Points

Strong rhythm throughout – formed of **dactylic dimeter**.

Rhyme used to further emphasis this

Six numbered stanzas – could this refer to the 600 soldiers?

Refrain of "six hundred" used to emphasis the sacrifice they made.

Rhetorical question poses a problem for the reader.

Graphic use of metaphor.

Lots of alliteration to focus on.

Context

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was one of the most important poets of the Victorian period. He was the Poet Laureate (the country's official poet) from 1850 until his death in 1892. His poems range from those focused on the legend of King Arthur to those dealing with the loss of a loved one.

The Crimean War took place between 1853 and 1856, with Imperial Russia on one side and an alliance including Britain and France on the other. The poem takes as its subject the Battle of Balaclava, one of the many battles of the war. During the battle a unit of British cavalry (the Light Brigade) mistakenly charged straight towards a Russian line of cannons. The soldiers demonstrated incredible bravery in attacking the guns, but little was achieved and the majority of the brigade lost their lives.

Poems to compare it with: *The Destruction of Sennacherib, Belfast Confetti, War Photographer.*



'The Man He Killed' by Thomas Hardy (1902)

Key language, form and structure points

- Both the speaker and the man he killed are nameless, universal, could be anyone.
- Each stanza opens with a speech mark suggesting a story being told – a dramatic monologue.
- Regular metre and abab rhyme scheme create chatty informal tone – juxtaposed with subject of death/killing.
- Simple vocabulary suggests common working class speaker – Dorset dialect eg *nipperkin*.
- No imagery, straight forward description.
- Uses a lot of repetition and parallel sentence structures to emphasise the pairings of the speaker and the man he has killed, such as "face to face" and "I shot at him as he at me"
- 3rd stanza, repetition of foe suggests the speaker trying to convince himself, but tails off with "although" at the end of the line.
- Hyphens in 4th stanza show the faltering in his reasoning.

Context

Written in 1902, at the time of the Second Boer War - fought between the British and the Dutch settlers of the Boer republics in what is now South Africa. *The Man He Killed* deals with the futility, or pointlessness, of war. It is told from the point of view of an ordinary working-class soldier, who is reflecting on the idea that the man he killed in battle probably had a lot in common with him. The idea of having a drink together suggests a sense of brotherhood between the ordinary soldiers. The lack of conviction in the narrator's voice about the necessity of killing the enemy man emphasises the idea that the soldiers who fight just follow orders, rather than knowing what it is they are doing.

Hardy was against the Boer War. Like many liberals of the time, he thought the Boers were simply defending their homes. Why did the British feel the need to keep their territory so strongly? Perhaps the diamond and gold mines of the area had something to do with it.

Key Quotations

"I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place"

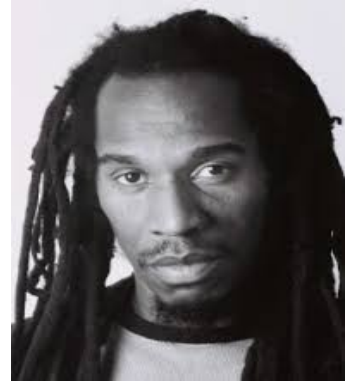
"I shot him dead because –
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he
was; That's clear enough;
although"

"Off-hand like – just as I"
"quaint and curious war is!"

Poems to compare it with:
*The Charge of the Light
Brigade, Exposure*

'No Problem' by Benjamin Zephaniah

(1996)



Key Quotations

"I am not de problem"

"I can do more dan dance"

"Black is not de problem, // Mother country get it right"

"I am born academic // But dey got me on de run"

"branded athletic"

"Sum of me best friends are white"

Key language, form and structure points

- Poet's own voice
- Uses dialect throughout – shows pride in his identity
- Intentionally spelling the words phonetically to emphasise his accent.
- Repetition of the refrain 'I am not de problem' – those who are prejudiced/racist *are* the problem
- 2 stanzas – represents divide

Context

Born in 1958 and raised in Handsworth, Birmingham, which he called the 'Jamaican capital of Europe'. As a child, he suffered from abuse based on the racial stereotyping prevalent in the 1960s and 70s.

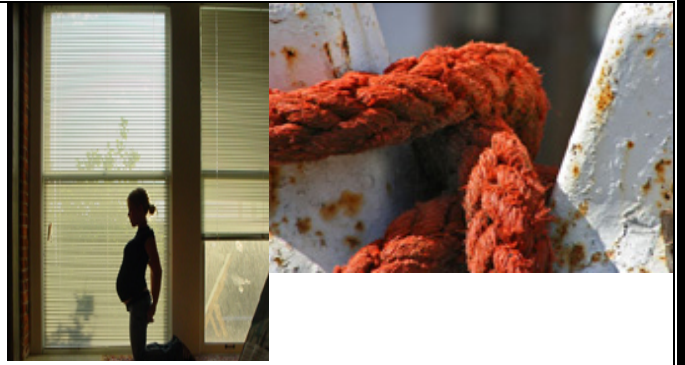
He also suffered racial abuse on the terraces of Aston Villa football team. He was dyslexic and was sent to an approved school but left at 13 unable to read or write. He later spent some time in jail for burglary. He has been creating poetry since a young age, mostly for performance.

Also a novelist and playwright, he was included in The Times list of Britain's top 50 post-war writers in 2008. He is now a prominent political activist, particularly in the fields of human and animal rights.

Poems to compare it with: 'Half Caste', 'The Class Game' 'Cousin Kate'

'Catrin' by Gillian Clarke

(1978)



Key Quotations

"I can remember you, child"

"the tight//Red rope of love"

"a hot, white room"

"our struggle to become
Separate. We want, we shouted,
To be two, to be ourselves."

"Still I am fighting// you off"

"that old rope,
Tightening about my life"

"you ask may you skate
In the dark, for one more hour"

Key language, form and structure points

- Repetition of 'I can remember...' – this is a memory she returns to again and gain
- Language of conflict throughout the poem shows the pain of birth
- Motherhood presented as a battle
- Oxymoron – 'wild, tender'
- Metaphors – symbolise both difficulty of birth/motherhood and the love
- Structural features such as 2 stanzas and use of enjambment and caesura – symbolise the fight for mother and daughter to become separate entities
- Rhyme of 'strong, long' childlike but proud

Context

Gillian Clarke (born 1937) was brought up in Wales speaking both English and Welsh. This poem is autobiographical, about the birth of her daughter, Catrin, and her relationship with her.

She wrote the poem to answer the question she once asked herself: 'Why did my beautiful baby daughter have to become a teenager?'

Poems to compare it with: '*Cousin Kate*' '*Poppies*' '*Half Caste*'