

Carol Ann Duffy



Paper 1 Telling Stories

Section C Poetic Voices

50 minutes

Exam format: Open book

AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression **15 marks**

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts are shaped – **15 marks**



Drawing both on their everyday experiences of storytelling in different modes, and on published texts, students learn how language choices help to shape the representations of different worlds and perspectives. They apply their knowledge to the following:

- narratives that construct different views of a particular place
- prose fiction that constructs imaginary worlds
- poetry that constructs a strong sense of personal perspective.

Key terms for this unit are:

Identity: the sense of a distinct self that is held by a speaker in a poem.

Poetic Voice: the way in which the speaker's sense of identity is projected through language choices so as to give the impression of a distinct *persona* with a personal history and a set of beliefs and values.

Point of view: the perspective(s) used in a text through which a version of reality is presented.

Genre: a way of grouping texts based on expected shared conventions.

Register: a variety of language that is associated with a particular situation of use.

The following list is a guide to the areas of language analysis students are expected to be familiar with:

phonetics, phonology and prosodics – for example, the sounds of real speech and the patterns of sound symbolism (rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia) that some writers employ

lexis and semantics – for example, the connotations of words and phrases, metaphor and idiomatic language

grammar – for example, how the use of pronouns can shape narrative viewpoints

pragmatics – for example, the assumptions made about listeners/readers by the speaker's/writer's language choices

Look out for the following features of Duffy's which are typical of Duffy's poetic voice:

- Reflections on **memories from childhood** and youth from the point of view of a more experienced, sometimes embittered, adult persona
- Discussion of the way language is used to **shape our view of the world and ourselves**
- Meditations on the **passing of time** and its corrosive effects
- A study of the **volatile and temporary nature of love**
- Close attention paid to everyday **domestic details**
- Mixing of **colloquial, sometimes taboo language** with more lyrical imagery
- Free verse, unrhymed
- Experimentation with the form and structure of poems, including a mixture of long and short lines
- Intertextuality – references to other literary works
- Some lyric poems – the poet uses 'I' to describe her intense emotional experiences
- Some **dramatic monologues** – the poet adapts a persona of a clearly defined character
- Images of darkness and turmoil often juxtaposed with humour

Looking forward- Conventions of spoken discourse in *Streetcar*. Representations of place and societies in *Handmaid's Tale*, *Gatsby* and *Streetcar*. The influence of contextual factors.

Poem	Themes
'The Captain of the 1964 <i>Top of the Form</i> Team' – DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE from the perspective of a middle-aged man who is disappointed by his current life and reminisces about his more successful school years.	disillusionment, memory, childhood
'Litany' – a poem in which the poet remembers how, as a child, she shocked her mother's friends by saying a swear word.	childhood, suburban life, memory, the power of language, the relationship between parents and children
'Nostalgia' – a poem about early mercenaries who leave their home in search of fortunes, but experience loneliness and longing; the concept of 'nostalgia' is thus introduced into other people's consciousness.	time, memory, the power of language
'Stafford Afternoons' – a child leaves her familiar street and goes to explore the woods, but is shocked by an encounter with a stranger.	memory, childhood
'Before You Were Mine' – the poet looks at photographs of her mother as a young woman and tries to imagine what her life must have been like before she became a mother.	the relationship between parents and children, the past and the effect of time
'Beachcomber' – the poet remembers a day she spent at the beach as a child.	childhood, memory, time
'First Love' – a LYRIC poem in which memories of a past lover are triggered by a dream.	memory, romantic relationships
'Valentine' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona uses the onion as a symbol of the pain of love as well as a metaphor for her undying loyalty.	romantic relationships, suffering, time
'The Biographer' – a DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE in which a man writing a biography of another writer realises that he can never measure up to his success.	disillusionment, time, identity
'The Cliché Kid' – a DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE in which a person appears to be telling their psychoanalyst about traumatic past experiences which have shaped their life.	the past, memory, romantic relationships, the power of language, the relationship between parents and children
'Small Female Skull' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona contemplates her mortality.	death, time, memory
'Small Female Skull' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona contemplates her mortality.	death, time, memory
'Never Go Back' – a LYRIC poem in which the persona returns to a place where she used to live and reflects on how much she and it have changed.	time, memory, identity
'Close' – a LYRIC poem about the emotions involved in the breakdown of a romantic relationship.	romantic relationships, suffering, time
'Mean Time' – a LYRIC poem in which the speaker expresses her regrets about the end of a relationship.	romantic relationships, suffering, time

Example question:

Examine how Duffy presents speakers' connections with places in 'Never Go Back' and one other poem of your choice.

AQA Model response

In Duffy's poems 'Never Go Back' and 'Beachcomber' connections with places are very significant. Each poem focuses on a number of places, with the extensive use of the second person pronoun. 'Never Go Back' moves between the places that are emphasised to stress particular aspects of them – for example the sterile emptiness of the bar, and the house full of haunting memories, while 'Beachcomber' begins and ends with the present, real situation. In between this framed structure each poem uses changes in location to reflect the imaginations and psychology of the poetic voice.

In 'Never Go Back', Duffy utilises a range of temporal and spatial deixis. Phrases such as 'in the bar', 'outside' and 'The house' set up focuses for each of the stanzas of the poem. The spatial deictic term 'here' is used throughout the poem to emphasise the connection that the speaker has to a particular space. In stanza 3, the past and present are brought together in a moment of revelation: 'You lived here only to stand here now and half-believe that you did'. Duffy draws extensively on the sound system - on rhyme 'lies'/'cries' and on sibilance 'suddenly', 'swarm', 'sting' 'disappear' to foreground the rapid painful connection that is re-established in the house and the image of the 'window' post-modified with 'myopic with rain' to highlight the previously repressed memories. This shows that Duffy seeks to portray the location negatively and highlight a destructive past. Further use of deixis is significant at the end, the deictic 'pulls you away' positions the addressee of the poem as moving away from the town, with the painful connection being broken.

In 'Beachcomber', a rich description of the beach setting is given as 'the platinum blaze of the sun'. This appears on the longest line of the poem and is therefore foregrounded as 'Beachcomber' is mostly constructed of relatively short lines. This is a positive and rich description because of the beautiful and evocative meanings usually associated with the terms 'platinum' and 'blaze'. Unlike in 'Never Go Back', this suggests that the beach is a glorious location. However, Duffy subverts this with the use of structure as the following line states 'turn away' on a new and indented line. This creates a sense of pathos as such a positive, fiery description leads to a disappointing outcome. By placing this on a new line Duffy has enacted the content of the poem as the reader has to follow the new line and indent and 'turn away' from the positive description.