***London* by William Blake**

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| ***Groups:*** | Home, Violence, Crime, Decay |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Exposure, Tissue, Remains, Poppies* |
| **Bio and Context: Blake** (1757-1827) was a **visionary¸** an artist, and one of the most important **Romantic** poets. The poem is part of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794). Blake lived in London, with first-hand experience of the noisy and polluted streets he describes. He had strong views against slavery, exploitation and organised religion, and his experiences of having regular ‘visions’ of angels and heaven led to many considering him mad. He died poor, and it wasn’t until the 20th Century that he was truly regarded as an artistic and poetic genius. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f7/St_Paul%27s_by_Thomas_Hosmer_Shepherd_%28early_19th_century%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb | In the first stanza, Blake is walking through streets that have all been mapped out and controlled by Man. Everywhere he looks, he sees weak and sad people. The second stanza focuses on the shouts children and adults, which Blake says echo their feeling trapped. The third stanza blames the church for supporting child labour rather than protecting children, and also criticises the monarchy for sending solders to their deaths. He saves his worst images for the final harrowing stanza, though, describing the vicious circle of young prostitutes cursing their own crying children - children who are already victims of a dark and hopeless world. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Regular form * Repetition and symbolism | |
| **In a Nutshell:** Like many of the angry poems in the *Experience* section, the poem reflects Blake’s strong views on the negative effects of poverty, the **industrial revolution**, prostitution and child labour on modern city life. He attacks the sense of control over people’s lives through the word ‘chartered’, and also criticises key pillars of the establishment, such as the ‘church’ and the ‘palace’ (monarchy). Instead of relying on visual images, Blake makes many references to the sounds of the streets, and also uses key symbols in the forms of buildings or people to represent the establishment and its victims. | |

***Exposure* by Wilfred Owen**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Fragile Life, Violence, Nature, Decay |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *London, Remains, War Photographer, The Charge of the Light Brigade, Bayonet Charge, Tissues* |
| **Bio and Context:** Transferred from the front line to Craiglockhart hospital in Scotland, due to severe shell-shock during the First World War, Owen met poet and fellow soldier Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon encouraged Owen to write war poetry; and Owen went on to become the best known of the ‘trench poets’. This poem was completed in September of 1918, just weeks before Owen was killed in battle, still only a young man. | |
| ***Summary:***  Wilfred Owen 2.png | The first two stanzas describe the appalling conditions of the Winter of 1917. Owen and his fellow soldiers wait nervously through the night, hearing distant battles while, for them, ‘nothing happens.’ Over the next stanzas, the morning brings no comfort, only conflict edging nearer as the snow takes hold of their senses. Stanzas five and six become more abstract and unusual, as the delirious men start to think of distant home, and how they are forgotten by loved ones and by God. In the chilling final stanza, Owen considers the next night ahead, where the cold will claim more victims while, still, ‘nothing happens’. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Regular stanzas and long, drawn out lines * Half-rhyme * Abstract and unusual imagery | |
| **In a Nutshell:** This masterpiece captures the horrific conditions of the front line in Winter. The men are at the mercy of the bitter weather, as the war ‘rumbles’ in the distance. Throughout the poem, Owen brings attention that nothing is happening, and conditions are worsening. He reflects that the men will not be welcomed home – their place is on the battlefield and God seems to have deserted them. Owen uses a multitude of powerful images, experimental vocabulary, and sharp poetic technique to rage against the brutality of modern warfare. | |

***The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred Lord Tennyson**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Violence, Power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Bayonet Charge, Exposure, Remains* |
| **Bio and Context:** Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was a popular Poet Laureate for during the Victorian period. He wrote this poem, in 1855, as a dramatic tribute to British cavalrymen who risked charging through an exposed valley during the Crimean War. He wrote it just minutes after reading an account of the battle in the *Times* newspaper. Whilst most of the poem centres on the bravery, honour and sacrifice of the soldiers, Tennyson reluctantly acknowledges that the Charge was the result of a misunderstood order, and that almost a third of the ‘noble six hundred’ died needlessly. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/18/Charge_of_the_Light_Brigade.jpg?uselang=en-gb | Stanza 1 sets the scene, describing the men charging on horseback, through a valley, towards enemy guns. Stanza 2 focuses on the morale of the men and their obeying orders without questioning, despite the fact that the order to charge was made in error. The next two stanzas focus on the sounds and weaponry of the battle, and how the Brigade started to breach the Russian enemy line at the end of the valley. Tennyson uses the fifth stanza to show how bravely they fought until forced to retreat, depleted in number. The shorter final stanza celebrates their bravery and says that the Light Brigade will always be remembered ‘wild’ charge – that the world will always be in awe of them. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Form * Rhythm (the famous **dactylic** pattern of one stressed syllable, followed by two unstressed) * Rhyme – quite a complex scheme, but a lot of rhyming for effect * Repetition | |
| **In a Nutshell:** The poem can either be read as a shameless celebration of the dedication and unquestioning bravery of these cavalrymen; or a more subtle critique of the risk and sacrifice men take in war. Either way, it is very exciting and memorable verse, carried forward by a strong yet complex rhyme scheme, and an irrepressible rhythm! Throughout a long and distinguished career, it is probably the poem that Tennyson will be most remembered for. | |

***Bayonet Charge* by Ted Hughes AOs: 1 2 and 3**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Fragile Life, Violence, Power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Exposure, Remains, Charge of the Light Brigade, Poppies, Kamikaze* |
| **Bio and Context:** Like Tennyson, Ted Hughes (1930-1998) was Poet Laureate from 1988 until he died, and is considered one of the best poets of his generation. Earlier in life, Hughes had served National Service, following in the footsteps of his father, who had fought at Ypres in the First World War. Hughes was also a great fan of the poet Wilfred Owen, whom he said inspired him to write *Bayonet Charge*, the story of a lone soldier caught unawares in battle during World War One. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/The_War_for_the_Union%2C_1862_--_A_bayonet_charge_%28Boston_Public_Library%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb | The opening suggests that the soldier is caught by surprise at having to engage action suddenly – Hughes uses words which give a sense of his sweating clumsiness as weapons fire off around him. His own rifle feels useless. The final two lines of stanza 1 suggest any pride he might have felt in fighting for his country is falling away in the heat and reality of battle. In stanza 2, the soldier stops to check himself, and questions there at all. Hughes uses abstract imagery and language to describe him as almost frozen in time at this point. Stanza 2 runs straight into stanza 3 (enjambment), as, suddenly, a nearby explosion throws up a ‘yellow hare’ out of the nearby trenches. The description of the animal is unsympathetic and horrific – as if describing casualties of war in a similar style to the war poet Wilfred Owen. The solder runs blindly on – presumably towards his enemy, as everything he has stood for falls away around him. The final words of the poem suggest he is charging towards an explosion and probably his own death. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Free verse * Abstract imagery | |
| **In a Nutshell:** *Bayonet Charge is a complex picture of a soldier who is caught up in battle, and left feeling that he doesn’t really know or care what he is fighting for. Hughes captures what many soldiers must have felt when faced with the horrific reality of trench warfare on a day-to-day basis. Ultimately, they are fighting for their own survival, rather than any noble beliefs, which have long-since gone.* | |

***Remains* by Simon Armitage AOs: 1 2 and 3**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Memory, Violence, Crime, Decay / Change |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Exposure, Kamikaze, Poppies, War Photographer* |
| **Bio and Context:** Armitage (b.1963) is a well-known and popular modern poet who has had many collections published, and was awarded the CBE in 2010. *Remains* appears in a collection called *The Not-Dead.* Ahead of writing the book, Armitage interviewed many veterans of modern conflicts, and used their words, thoughts and feelings to pen a series of poems about modern warfare and the effects of conflict on the individual. *Remains* tells the story, first-hand, of a retired soldier whole conscience is haunted by an episode from the near-past whilst fighting abroad. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/A_British_soldier_mans_a_L7A2_machine_gun_atop_a_Bedford_TM_truck.JPEG?uselang=en-gb | The opening stanza suggests that the narrator is telling this as one of series of episodes. The use of present tense suggests he is re-living it as he tells us: he and his fellow soldiers are patrolling in an unspecified country and are tasked with dealing with civilian looters who have looted a local bank, presumably after the area has been bombed. They don’t know whether the looters are armed. The next two stanzas describe, quite graphically, how the soldiers quickly decide to shoot until the looter lies on the ground, his guts ‘inside out’. The fourth stanza sees the remains of the looter being piled back into the lorry. The next three stanzas describe how, going home on leave, the soldier tries to come to terms with what he has done. He relives the moment when asleep and awake, and the ‘drink and drugs’ won’t clear his mind. In the chilling final lines, he seems to realise that he, and he alone, is responsible for taking the other man’s life. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Colloquial / simple language * Regular four-lined stanzas (apart from the final two lines) * Enjambment * Graphic imagery | |
| **In a Nutshell:** This is one of a number of poems where Armitage captures the effects of modern war on an individual (see also the very powerful *Manhunt*). The endless flashbacks recreate the horrific effects of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder, or what the veterans of the First World War used to call ‘shell shock’. Armitage’s neat, contained stanzas replicate the soldiers attempt to justify and contain what he has done, whilst the violent imagery, and enjambment show how emotions and reality start to spill out of him to the point where he can no longer contain or justify past events. | |

**Extract from *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth**

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| ***Groups:*** | | Memory, Nature, Power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | | *Poppies, Storm on the Island, Exposure* |
| **Bio and Context:** William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is one of the biggest names in English poetry, and was partly responsible for launching the *Romantic* movement, which focused on representing nature, emotion, and man in new, powerful ways. Wordsworth did this in many poems, most notably the very long poem considered to be his masterpiece, *The Prelude.* The poem is semi-autobiographical and focuses on the development of the mind of a poet. Wordsworth experienced the French Revolution first hand, had one child out of marriage, but married again. He settled in his beloved Lake District and enjoyed being the Poet Laureate for the last seven years of his life. | | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/56/Benjamin_Robert_Haydon_002.jpg | In **lines 1-5,** he describes how, as a boy, he stole a boat and sailed it across the lake towards a mountain peak.  **Lines 6-13** describe the surface of the lake and the still night around him, until he spies the ‘craggy ridge’. He is compelled to row towards this horizon until, in **line 24**, a huge mountain peak becomes visible before him. It towers above him and he becomes afraid, eventually turning away from it in **line 29**. He feels the presence of the mountain bearing down on him in these powerful lines. Shocked, he leaves the boat where he found it in **line 31** and, partly in shock, returns home. The final part of the poem describes how the brooding shape of the mountain haunts his every living thought and nightly dream. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * No division of stanzas – all one verse * Use of blank verse – iambic pentameter and no rhyme * Powerful imagery and an ambiguous deeper meaning | | |
| **In a Nutshell:** In this section of his masterpiece, Wordsworth tries to capture a childhood moment that leaves a huge impression on him. It could be that Nature punishes him for his act of ‘troubled pleasure’ - stealing the boat; but the huge, brooding presence of the mountain ‘pinnacle’ and the heavy pull of the lake echo his troubled thoughts whilst allowing him to be in complete awe of the beauty and landscape around him. It is this that helps develop his poetic soul. | | |

***Storm on the Island* by Seamus Heaney**

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| ***Groups:*** | | Violence, Nature, Power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | | *Exposure, The Prelude, Kamikaze* |
| **Bio and Context:** Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was one of the most admired of the modern Irish poets and has even been called the ‘greatest poet of our age’. Often, Heaney’s poetry described the natural beauty of his homeland, and he also write about men who worked on the land. He wrote a series of poems about ancient people whose bodies were perfectly preserved in bog land. Although he refused to express strong views on the political troubles of Northern Ireland, his poems often included hidden references to it. He also excelled as a translator, translating epic poems, such as Beowulf, from Anglo-Saxon into Modern English. | | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/03/Seamus_Heaney_%28cropped%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb | The poem is written from the perspective of an isolated community that lives on a remote island, awaiting the arrival of a fierce storm. Whether they live in modern or ancient times is uncertain. **Lines 1-7** describes how their croft houses are built to withstand pressure from storms, with **lines 8-11** exploring the sounds of the storm as it ‘pummels’ your house. From **lines 12- 16,** Heaney uses imagery to explore the people’s relationship with the storm, and how it attacks them. The remaining section of the poem describes their reaction and reflection on what the storm does, and how they see it – ‘a huge nothing’ – something that can be felt but not seen. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * No division of stanzas – all one verse * Use of blank verse – iambic pentameter and no rhyme * Use of caesura (pauses or punctuation mid-line) to break up rhythm within lines * Powerful imagery and use of hard-hitting, blunt vocabulary | | |
| **In a Nutshell:** As in many of his poems, Heaney is in awe of the power of nature. These people live with the elements, and are prepared for them; but the storm is always a mighty unpredictable force that they live in ‘fear’ of. It is given a savage and aggressive personality in the poem, and the first weight letters of the title – ‘Stormont’ – (the name of the Northern Ireland Assembly buildings in Belfast) suggest that the storm could be some kind of metaphor for the political ‘troubles’ of Northern Ireland. | | |

***Poppies* by Jane Weir**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Memory, Fragile Life, Home |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Exposure, Tissue, Remains, War Photographer, Kamikaze* |
| **Bio and Context:** Born in 1963, **Jane Weir** has much experience of living and travelling abroad, having lived in Italy, Northern England, and Northern Ireland. She was asked to write this poem by poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, in order to explore links between death in past wars and deaths in more recent conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Weir’s interests in textiles – she has her own design company – also emerge in this poem. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0d/Papaver_dubium_subsp._dubium.jpg | The poem explores, in a complex way, a mother’s feelings for her son, a soldier. The first stanza, up to **line 6**, explores their commemoration of Armistice Day by her pinning a poppy to his lapel. In stanza two (**lines 7 to 17**), she is brushing ‘cat hairs’ from his uniform, and feels, in vain, that she wants to protect him as she did when he was little. The third stanza (**18-29**) sees her letting him out into the world – and, presumably, armed conflict. References to the ‘church yard walls’ towards the end of the stanza imply that he is later killed in conflict. The final lines (**30 to 35**) finds her alone in a war memorial, aware of her son’s spirit, but longing to hear the ‘playground voice’ of her son again |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Use of free verse throughout, and some enjambment between stanzas * The recurrent use of ‘textiles’ imagery through the poem * Movements back and forth in time through the stanzas | |
| **In a Nutshell:** In *Poppies*, Weir fulfils Duffy’s brief really well: through linking the mother and son’s commemoration of Armistice Sunday to the son’s own life as a soldier, she conveys the message that war and grief are processes that never really end. They connect and intertwine, bringing both longing and a strange sense of comfort. | |

***War Photographer* by Carol Ann Duffy**

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| ***Groups:*** | War, Memory, Fragile Life, Home |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Bayonet Charge, Remains, Poppies, Kamikaze, Tissues* |
| **Bio and Context: Carol Ann Duffy** (born 1955) is one of Britain’s best-known poets. As ‘Poet Laureate’ it is her job to write poems for important state occasions, and she is the first Scot, woman and lesbian to have been given this position. Duffy was friends with two war photographers, Don McCullin and Philip Jones; and she was fascinated by the idea of how they felt in their role –taking still photographs of people suffering but not taking any direct role in the conflict or their lives. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9b/Carol_Ann_Duffy_%28cropped%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb | In the first of four six-line stanzas, Duffy describes the war photographer preparing his materials in his ‘dark room’, getting ready to develop photographs of war zones he has visited. He sets out his equipment as a priest does his. As he prepares to develop the images, he becomes aware of the differences between the land of his home life and the war-torn places he has visited in his job. His photographs start to develop before him in the third stanza – harsh images of war that take him back to the awful things he has seen and heard. In the final stanza, Duffy tells of how the photographer will ick just a few of the many images to appear in a Sunday newspaper. She imagines a typical bloke looking over the images, feeling bad for a moment, and then moving on with his normal Sunday routine. The final ambiguous lines of the poem ask whether the war photographer feels the same as he is caught between his home life and the place of his work. |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Neat, regular six line stanzas * Regular rhyme scheme, but obscured by irregular rhythms, caesura and enjambment | |
| **In a Nutshell:** Duffy is careful to portray the photographer as an outside might see him. She lets us have glimpses into how he might feel about taking these pictures; but shows us that, even though he chooses to distance himself from the suffering of others, it is he who brings us the pictures. We, the observers, are even more distant. | |

***Kamikaze* by Beatrice Garland**

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| ***Groups:*** | | War, Memory, Fragile Life, Home, Nature, Crime, Change |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | | *Tissue, Remains, War Photographer, Kamikaze, Emigree, Checking Out me History* |
| **Bio and Context: Beatrice Garland** was born in 1938, and has also worked as a teacher. This, probably her most famous poem, is about the Japanese ‘Kamikaze’ pilots of the Second World War. Meaning ‘divine wind’, the pilots loaded their fighter planes loaded their aircraft with bombs, and flew suicide missions into enemy US ships. Surprisingly, less than 20% of Kamikaze attacks managed to hit target ships; and almost 4000 Kamikaze pilots died during the war. Pilots who returned from failed or aborted missions were often seen as failures, and many were shunned by friends and family. | | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cf/Kamikaze-characters.png | The poem is seen through the eyes of woman who is a pilot’s daughter. She is discussing her father’s experiences with her own children – the pilot’s grandchildren. Although mostly told in the third person, it switches to her direct voice in the final two stanzas. The first stanza describes the prepared and determined pilot heading out on his mission. In the next two stanzas, she is imagining him in his plane, looking over the ocean, and seeing fishing boats. She imagines that this would have reminded him of being with his brothers as a child, waiting for their fisherman father to return with his catch. This is a clear contrast to how the pilot’s family behave upon his return, which is explored in the final two stanzas: they see him as a disgrace, and ignore him. It is not clear whether this was because he failed his mission, or because he was prepared to die for his country above providing for his family. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Six-line stanzas, but no regular rhythm or rhyme scheme used * The switch from third to first person perspective towards the end of the poem * Use of foreshadowing and vivid natural imagery to compare relationships with fathers and explore concepts of danger and sacrifice | | |
| **In a Nutshell:** *Kamikaze* explores a controversial topic from a very human angle. Many in the West wondered how anyone human could fly these missions and write off their own lives and relationships in such a focused and brutal way. Garland wonders what this was like for the families and also for the pilot himself. It is a topic which resonates in today’s world as much as it did during the conflict over the Pacific in the Second World War. | | |

***Tissue* by Imtiaz Dharker**

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| ***Groups:*** | Fragility, Decay and Change |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Ozymandias, Kamikaze, The Emigree* |
| **Bio and Context: Imtiaz Dharker** (born 1954) was born in Pakistan but grew up in Glasgow, where she moved when she was just one. She currently lives and works in both London and Mumbai. She has written five collections of poetry, all of which she has illustrated with her own pen and ink drawings. Dharker is also a film documentary-maker, which explains the very rich visual imagery in many of her poems. Themes which regularly crop up in her poetry include culture clashes and loss of identity, as well as gender roles. | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/Imtiaz_Dharker_at_the_British_Library_12_April_2011.jpg?uselang=en-gb | The poem is an extended metaphor where paper – especially tissue paper – represents life itself. As well as being a type of paper, the word ‘tissue’ also refers to the tissues of a human being’s body. In **stanzas 1 and 2**, Dharker states that paper carries important meaning, sheds light on the world’s problems, and that books such as the Koran can change the world. **Stanzas 3 and 4** explore how books hold a fading history, and the memories and records of people, in much the same way buildings do. This makes the world seem very fragile. She explores two more paper forms in **stanzas 5 and 6**: maps carry our journey’s and chart exploration; shop receipts and card statements show how we have spent our money and therefore lived. In **stanzas 7, 8 and 9**, Dharker’s ideas become more abstract – she discusses the architect planning his buildings of paper, but then explores the ideas of buildings becoming ‘living tissue’, or made out of a paper so thin that it eventually disappears or ‘smooths away’. This suggests that all material things will eventually pass, as does each human life. This is completed in the final line which asks the reader to imagine all ‘structures’ have ‘turned into your skin.’ |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Movement of ideas through uses of paper * Neat, four-lined stanzas – a pattern only broken by an isolated final line * The use of very little [punctuation, and enjambment to allow the poem to flow. | |
| **In a Nutshell:** This is a complex poem with ambiguous meaning, especially towards the end. The poet seems to be suggesting that human life is very much as tissue paper – fragile, carrying symbols and meaning in its writings, but also capable of letting the ‘daylight break through’ – which seems a positive comment on the human condition. The final idea of imagining a building to be made of skin is a complex one open to many different meanings – there is no one answer! Perhaps she wishes to suggest that poetry, also written on paper, is complex and multi-layered, like life itself. | |

***Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley**

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| ***Groups:*** | | Memory, Fragile Life, Decay / Change, Power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | | *Tissue, Remains, Kamikaze, My Last Duchess* |
| **Bio and Context:** Shelley (1792-1822) is one of the most influential poets in the English language, despite not being famous in his own lifetime. He worked with other **Romantic** poets including his second wife Mary (author of *Frankenstein*), Byron and Keats. He was also a great admirer of William Wordsworth’s poetry. As an atheist, pacifist and vegetarian, Shelley’s radical views on rights for the poor and non-violent rebellion landed him in trouble, and he spent much of his short life living in Europe. *Ozymandias* was written after the British Museum announced that had acquired a section of a huge statue of Ramesses II. Shelley and his friend, Horace Smith, each wrote a poem about the statue in competition with each other. | | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Percy_Bysshe_Shelley_by_Alfred_Clint.jpg | In this sonnet, the narrator (unnamed but possibly Shelley himself), tells of a traveller who, through thirteen lines of the poem, describes a huge, shattered statue that he has seen on his travels. The first four lines focus on the parts of the statue that remain visible in the sand – the legs (still standing) and the head, a short distance away. The traveller describes the face as being cruel and full of contempt. Lines 6 to 8 focus on imagining the sculptor carving his statue with the living king present, and on how the king ‘mocked’ and ‘fed’ on the people of his kingdom. The focus then shifts to the words on the pedestal, which commands those looking upon the statue to look around in awe at the surrounding powerful empire and legacy. The fact that nothing but desert sand now surrounds the statue is the final irony that is pointed out at the end of the poem in the final three lines. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Unusual sonnet form – it has 14 lines and loose pentameter, but an atypical rhyme scheme * The use of a narrator within the narrative, and an inscription read out within that * The subject – power and corruption and mortality – is unusual for Shelley, but reflects his radical views. | | |
| **In a Nutshell:** This famous and hugely memorable poem is a reflection on how power and tyranny will always be eroded by time and history. The ‘king of kings’ had complete contempt for all around him, and ruled through fear, believing that his reign – and his statue – would last through time. Now his reputation, like the statue, is ruined and largely forgotten in the mists of time. In another clever layer of the poem, Shelley is also showing us that certain art forms – such as poetry – have the ability to transcend time and become immortal. It’s no coincidence that Shakespeare, much admired by Shelley, also wrote many sonnets on this theme. | | |

***My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning**

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| ***Groups:*** | | Fragile life, violence, crime, power |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | | *Ozymandias, Tissue, Kamikaze, Remains* |
| **Bio and Context:** Browning (1812-1889) was a poet and playwright, most famous for his *dramatic monologues,* which often portrayed the dark thoughts of vivid characters, and cast light on periods of history surrounding them with keen irony. He was married to a better-known poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and their life in Italy greatly influenced his verse. Browning’s verse if often considered quite challenging and difficult to read. The poem is based very loosely on the 16th century Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso. He is talking to someone who has been employed to negotiate the terms of the duke’s marriage with a young woman from a wealthy family. As they walk and talk, the duke points out the portrait of another beautiful young woman who, it turns out, was his last wife. During his monologue, he inadvertently reveals the dark history of the marriage and his other wife’s death. | | |
| ***Summary:***  https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Robert_Browning_%281865_photogravure_by_Julia_Margaret_Cameron%29.jpg | **Lines 1-5:** The duke points out the portrait of the previous duchess, now dead, painted by the artist Fra Pandolf. **Lines 6-13** The duke keeps the portrait behind a curtain, and only she is allowed to reveal it. He says he mentioned the name of the painter, as many who have seen the picture marvel at the rich expression and detail (no-one has said this, but the duke arrogantly assumes so). **Lines 13-15:** In these key lines, the duke points out the blush (‘spot of joy’) on the duchess’ cheeks – he suggests that these should appeared purely for him, but says she also allowed them to appear for others – suggesting she had impure thoughts for others. **Lines 15-24:** The duke imagines what the painter may have said to bring out the blush - perhaps that he asked her to reveal more of her flesh for him to paint. He seems to blame the duchess for deciding to blush rather than seeing it as a modest response that she is unable to control. He then goes on to criticise her more, saying that she liked everything she saw and was not particular or serious enough for his liking. **Lines 25-31:** He develops this idea further, She is pleased by anything, whether it is valuable or not, not always saying anything, but blushing in the same way. He also refers to other ‘officious fools’ (i.e. people [poking their noses in) bringing her such gifts. **Lines 31-35:** The duke complains that his last duchess thanked people too much for trivial things, even though it was he who gave her the ‘gift of a nine-hundred-year-old name’ – her title. He implies that he is superior to her and she should have been more grateful. **Lines 35-45:** The duke makes excuses for not raising his problems directly with the duchess – he claims not to have the necessary skills of speech; and that talking may have put her off other skills he wished to teach her. He also claims that talking would be bringing him down to her level. He also admits that she always smiled when he passed her – but this was nothing special as she smiled for everyone. **Lines 45-53:** In these very sinister lines, the duke says her smiling and niceness grew more extreme until he ‘gave commands’, after which, all smiles ‘stopped together’. Many readers see this as an admission of murder. Whatever happened, she is now merely his ‘last duchess’; so something has clearly happened to her at this point! The duke gestures towards the painting again and suggests they move on to the rest of the company. **Lines 53-56:** We learn here that the listener (who appears to be trying to get away from the duke) is the servant of a Count, whose daughter the duke wishes to marry. He claims he is doing this for the woman rather than the money. On the way down, he points to another work of art – Neptune taming a sea-horse, cast in bronze. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * The whole poem is a ‘dramatic lyric’ – in the voice of the Duke of Ferrara himself * Iambic pentameter rhythm and enjambment strike a balance between the witty sophistication and the conversational elements of the duke’s speech. | | |
| **In a Nutshell:** Behind the duke’s arrogance and pride, we can see the character of a sinister and paranoid man who craves control and power.The duchess (the ‘last’ and his next) are his possessions, just as his art collection is; and he will get rid of them if they no longer please him. It is a comment on male dominance, power and paranoia in sixteenth century Italy. | | |

***Checking Out Me History* by John Agard**

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| ***Groups:*** | Memory, Identity, Home, Change |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Tissue, Kamikaze, Emigree, Checking Out me History* |
| **Bio and Context: John Agard** was born in Guyana(a country in South America, formerly owned by the British) in 1949. Guyana is made up of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The main languages spoken there are English and Creole. Always having had a love of language and poetry, Agard moved to Britain in the 70s with Grace Nichols, also a famous poet. Often, his poetry takes on ‘The Establishment’ – people who run the country and fear change of any kind. Agard explores the idea that people from different backgrounds are often force-fed the history of their new countries, at the expense of finding out about their own heritage. Agard takes on the voice of someone like himself – who has lived in Britain for some time but who wants to explore more of his own identity. | |
| ***Summary:***  (NB Please see *Poem by Poem*  sheet for more detail on individual references in the poem)  Written in dialect, it’s from the perspective of someone who has moved to Britain, but has a strong heritage from a different country. The first five lines protest against being told that his history is that of the country he has moved to, when he feels that he has a richer history to explore. The rest of the poem is structured around concrete examples contrasting the history he has been forced to learn, against the history of his culture that he is interested in. His vision of the ‘real’ history is often a lot more poetically expressed the ‘text book’ version he has been taught. The poem ends positively, with Agard stating, with determination that he will ‘carve out’ his own identity. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * Non-Standard English, influenced by Creole * Structure moving between taught identity and what is his actual background * Quick, fluid verse with some very short lines and no punctuation to slow it down | |
| **In a Nutshell:** Agard explores the hypocrisy and irony of a country trying to force its history and identity onto someone who has moved there from elsewhere. He argues that identity is all about the individual – you don’t adopt it from your new country. His rich dialect and use of repetition reinforces his determination to cling to his ‘roots’ whatever the rulers of his adopted country might have in mind! | |

***The Emigree* by Carol Rumens**

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| ***Groups:*** | Memory, Identity, Home, Fragile Life |
| ***Good poems to link with:*** | *Tissue, Kamikaze, Checking Out me History, Remains* |
| **Bio and Context: Carol Rumens** was born in 1944, and has written a novel and a number of award-winning poetry collections. The poem finds a person reflecting on a home city that they have been forced to leave – the word ‘Emigree’ is the feminine spelling of the word, making it clear that Rumens wishes to write from a female perspective (which she often does in her poetry). Rumens doesn’t specify a city or a country of origin, therefore making the focus on the person and her predicament more important than any actual place. | |
| https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Ungarn_September_2015_%2821138294115%29.jpg***Summary:*** The poem is divided into three stanzas of eight lines apiece. In the **first stanza**, the nameless female narrator describes the city as she remembers it as a child, with positive reflections and images such as ‘sunlight’. This contrasts, she says, with the reports she hears of what happens there now – it is full of ‘war, and being run by ‘tyrants’. In the more difficult **second stanza,** the narrator, she talks of the city of being a positive place in her mind that she is desperate to cling on to, despite time and events probably changing the reality of the place. The **final stanza** develops the idea that, even if she can’t explore her home city physically, she can return to the ‘original view’ of the city of her childhood. Here, the poem takes on a darker tone, though, as she describes the hostility of people towards her in the new ‘free city.’ She knows that, to them, she seems secretive, a ‘dark’ outsider giving nothing away. | |
| **Interesting Features:**   * An unusual balance between a positive and negative narrator’s voice * recurrent imagery of light and the spoken word * Irregular rhythm, caesura and enjambment within three regularly-sized stanzas | |
| **In a Nutshell:** In this complex poem, Rumens captures the dilemma of the modern asylum-seeker. To the outsider, she has fled her own war-stricken home in search of more promise in the free world, and appears ungrateful and closed as a stranger in their land. But she clings on to the much more positive child’s-eye view she has of her homeland, which is something very personal to her, but to which she can never return. In many ways, it is very much a poem of our times. | |