

Rhymes and Rhythms

An Oxford Poetry Course for Junior Secondary

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Preface

Poetry is almost certainly the most neglected part of the English work in African secondary schools. We have compiled this anthology because we believe that such a neglect denies our pupils something which could well be one of the most vital experiences in their education, and because we consider that poetry is a necessary and integral part of a proper English course. One problem for the teacher has been the comparative lack of interesting poems of suitable linguistic level for his pupils, especially those in the junior forms. Also, many anthologies have presented a restricted range of poetry for the teacher to use. We hope that this book will meet the needs of Forms one to three, providing a wide variety of material, both in theme and style.

To say that the anthology is specifically for use in these classes does not mean, however, that the poems are not worth studying at higher levels. Many of the poems are admirably suited to classes above Year three, either as an introduction to poetry for those students who have had no previous experience, or as material for more formal study than would be the case with younger people.

The book is designed as a teaching book, with a considerable number of practical suggestions to aid the teacher in his course and lesson planning.

There are three main sections:

1 *Introduction to the teacher*

This briefly outlines some general principles of poetry-teaching.

2 *The anthology*

The emphasis is on African poetry, with numerous examples of traditional, oral poems translated into English. The anthology as a whole is made up, however, of poetry from many sources, including Europe, America, and Asia. The poems are grouped according to linguistic level and, within each level, according to theme so that there is a reasonable progression through the book. Individual poems usually include one or more of the following:

- a. a short introductory note;
- b. explanation of the more difficult or unusual language items in the poem (this has been deliberately kept to a minimum so that pupils may feel

- encouraged to try to work out meaning from context, and because the finer points of language can only be dealt with adequately by the teacher during class discussion);
- c. basic questions directly related to the poem, dealing with points of comprehension and style.

3 *Additional teaching notes*

Here the teacher is offered suggestions for related activities arising from the reading of the poem, such as drama, choral reading, discussion, and writing.

Unashamedly, the emphasis throughout is on poetry as a lively and pleasurable activity, to be presented at this stage of the school with flexibility and informality. In this way, the pupils should develop a real taste for poetry. Without this, the main aim of the course, inculcating the act of reading for enjoyment, cannot be achieved. If pupils enjoy the poetry and begin to learn to read it thoughtfully and imaginatively, the foundation is being laid for the more formal approach demanded by the public examinations which many of them will take later. Even those who will not in fact take Literature as one of their subjects for School Certificate should have acquired some sense of the enormous pleasure which poetry provides. This is something which we hope will stay with them and enrich their lives long after they have left school.

Our thanks go to Tony Lawton, who gave such valuable assistance in the preparation of this book.

Introduction to the teacher

Teaching poetry

To leave poetry out of a language course is . . . to renounce an extremely effective and labour-saving method of absorbing useful language. It is also to abandon opportunities to humanize and warm what otherwise may be a very dry and chilly traffic in words and information. It is to renounce the hope of delivering us from the pedestrian writing – if not platitudes – of the textbook writer. It is to neglect an important and powerful aid in establishing in the pupils' minds a favourable mental set. *It is to stop short of what might be most rewarding in the pupils' experience of language.*¹

This summary by F. Billows of the importance of poetry in a language course is a useful starting-point in any consideration of the reasons why we teach poetry. It reminds us of any basic truth that poetry and language are inextricably linked. It helps to correct the mistaken view which some teachers hold that poetry should not be taught because it is a mere decorative addition to language, remote from ordinary life and of no practical value.

Poetry is not, it is true, something which should be used, like comprehension passages or structural drills, to *teach* language or give formal practice, but any teacher who ignores poetry altogether is cutting out from his work a vital language experience and an aid to language-learning. It would be very wrong indeed for a teacher who brings poetry into the classroom to feel that he was 'wasting time'.

In the first place, by studying poetry pupils exercise all the language skills in a purposeful way: *listening* to readings and other people's opinions; *talking* about poems and their own related experiences; *reading*, with a special care and attentiveness; and *writing*, either essays or creative pieces of their own.

Secondly, they are further exposed to, and thereby becoming increasingly familiar with, words and structures as used by good writers.

More than this, however, they are experiencing language that is characterized by a very special precision and vividness, and that directly involves them as feeling, thinking, and imaginative individuals.

One point which is important to stress is that poetry is not in any way 'unnatural' language. It is, as Ezra Pound remarked, 'simply language

¹ F. Billows, *The Techniques of Language Teaching* (Longman Group Ltd.)

charged with meaning to the fullest possible degree'. This is why an education in poetry is an education in language in its most expressive form. This does not mean, however, that poetry needs to be difficult or obscure to be good. Most of the poems in this book, for instance, are written in simple English, in natural rhythms and with an easy, conversation tone.

A particularly useful definition of poetry is that W. H. Auden and John Garret, namely: 'memorable speech'. When pupils read or hear a poem, they are not facing some artificial and contrived contortion, but language which is rooted in living speech. The distinction of poetry, however, lies in the fact that the language used is memorable, because of the sharpness and striking emotional impact of the words, and the rhythmic qualities of that language. Such language can give pupils a taste of the colour, richness and excitement of English. It is largely because of this that young people so often respond with such enthusiasm to poetry. If the teacher taps this enthusiasm and involvement early in the school, he should be able to build upon it and develop a lasting interest for poetry in the pupils. Much of the resistance to poetry sometimes found at higher levels in the school is caused by neglect in the junior years.

Most people who write about poetry-teaching emphasize, quite rightly, the need to create an informal, lively atmosphere in the class so that the poems are seen to be a source of *pleasure*. This is easy when one is dealing with obviously light, humorous poems, but even with serious poems it is important not to let the poetry lesson ever become a solemn, dreary affair. It is especially important (at this stage, anyway) to avoid turning the lesson into a formal study of different points of 'poetic style'. We should remember that to read and enjoy a poem, nothing is necessary except the poem itself. Our central aim should be to *relate the poems to the pupils' own lives and experiences*. This is important for two main reasons. First, pupils can feel that poetry is understandable and meaningful because it deals with realities that they can or have experienced, actually or imaginatively. Secondly they can also feel that their experiences are important and to be respected.

A poem can be accepted as an extra 'voice' in the classroom, telling a joke, narrating a story, describing some aspect of the world we live in, commenting on human behaviour, expressing a feeling or an idea. It is in the form of a poem merely because the writer had no better way of saying what he wanted to say. Our main responsibility as readers is to understand that voice and, perhaps, to be challenged by the fresh insights that a good poem may offer.

It should be clear from these comments that background information on the poets, analysis of rhyme-schemes, labelling of figures-of-speech, marking of rhythm patterns, and other exercises in the study of 'style' are of secondary importance. Questions such as 'What is an iambic pentameter? Where does the poet use hyperbole in that poem? What are six examples of

simile in this poem?' merely create unnecessary anxieties and problems, and divert attention from the main issues.

This does not mean that the rhythms of poetry or the comparisons which the poet makes through metaphor and simile can be ignored. Appropriate language is what makes good literature, and full understanding of a poem's meaning is impossible without examining closely the language which has been used. The sort of questions we should ask are: 'Why has the poet used that word or phrase instead of another which is perhaps more common? What does he mean by it?' The focus of our attention is on the meaning, and the meaning of a poem is to be found only in the particular words used and the way they are arranged.

Choosing poems

The first step in the actual teaching of poetry, of course, is the teacher's selecting of the poems for the pupils to study, both from within an anthology such as this and from other sources as supplementary material. What considerations should he keep in mind when making that choice? There are two major factors: interest and relevance; and language level.

1 *Interest and relevance*

The first of these points is the most important. Quite simply, the poems should be worth reading! It is not easy, of course, to define what makes a poem good or not, but our choice is based mainly on the essential aim of the teaching which was mentioned earlier – the poetry should be relevant to the pupils' lives and experiences. In general, this would mean that the poetry be African in origin, as this deals with the African situation and makes use of images and themes which can be shared by the pupils. In this anthology, a particular stress has been placed on traditional verse from Africa, if only because this is still, surprisingly, a badly neglected part of African literature in most school texts. ¹ If our pupils are to respect their own lives and culture, it is important that they respect the traditional, intrinsically African, experiences and values expressed in folk literature.

Not all the poems are drawn from Africa, however. The teacher needs to be sensibly flexible in his selection of material and be willing to use poems of any origin, so long as they are suitable.

2 *Language level*

The poems should be within the pupils' linguistic range. This is a general rather than an absolute rule. A complexity of structure and vocabulary

¹ One particularly good collection of traditional African poetry is Ulli Beier, *African Poetry* (C.U.P.).

can destroy the value of reading a poem because it leads to a sense of dissatisfaction in the pupils and makes the poem, quite literally, meaningless. The simplest poems in this selection should be understandable and enjoyable for all, including classes higher than Year Three. The more difficult the poems have, of course, to be used more selectively, fitted to the particular group being taught. However, it is possible to make too much of this point of difficulty. If pupils realize that they will have to think especially carefully about the language, and if they trust the teacher, they will always rise to and meet quite complex poetry. Also, difficulty is sometimes a matter not so much of the language in a poem as the manner and depth of reading. How, for example, can one 'grade' a poem like Rubadiri's *African Thunderstorm*? It is a powerful, vivid description of a storm which most pupils of Form Two or Three should be able to appreciate; it is also a very well-written poem which rewards a more formal study by advanced students of poetry.

The final selection must be, inevitably, a subjective one. Any choice must finally be personal, as it is an important rule of poetry-teaching (perhaps, indeed, the only one) that a teacher should not teach a poem which he himself does not like. Also, the teacher needs to be aware of the capacities and interests of the class he is teaching and adjust his selection accordingly.

One last comment needs to be made. No matter how carefully chosen a poem may be, no matter how much we like it ourselves, no matter how often it has been used successfully with certain classes, we should always be prepared for the possibility that a poem will fail with a particular group of pupils. Perhaps it is too difficult for them; perhaps it simply does not interest them. In such a situation, we should accept this and move on to something else.

The presentation of poetry

General

In the strictest sense, we cannot teach poetry. When we speak of 'teaching' poetry, we really mean exposing the pupils to a variety of decent poems in such a way that they may enjoy them and think intelligently about them. Inevitably, reading and talking about poetry means coming to a personal judgement about the poems and trying to relate them to our individual experiences. This is something which the pupils can only do for themselves; the teacher's role is to make the initial presentation of the poem to them and then to help understanding.

The success of a poetry lesson depends, of course, very largely on the quality of the teacher's presentation. This does not mean 'tricks' of methodology but, far more important, the quality of his own response. Is the teacher himself enthusiastic about the poem? Is he alive to the spirit of the verse and the significance of the language? These really are the sort of factors

which matter in determining whether the pupils come to appreciate poetry. The teacher should try to convey to the pupils his own sense of pleasure in poetry, which he wants to share with them.

The first step towards presentation, after the poem has been selected, is preparation. Is there anything which the teacher has to look up to fully understand the poem? At what points does the poem touch on the pupils' experiences? Does the poem require some kind of introduction? Are there special considerations to be kept in mind about the reading aloud? What could be the most fruitful lines of questioning? What are the key phrases or features of the poem to which the pupils' attention should be drawn? What is the best way of developing the lesson after reading?

This last question has a multitude of possible answers, simply because there is no single 'right' way to treat poetry in class. Some poems are so straightforward and immediate in their appeal that just sharing them through reading to the class may be all that is wanted. Others demand fairly detailed discussion, either of difficulties in the poem itself or of its wider significance.

Basic Procedure

To allow all poetry lessons to follow the same pattern would lead to monotony, which is as undesirable in this as in other parts of the English work. However, it is perhaps a good thing to have a basic outline of procedure to work to, to develop or select from. Here is such a possible outline:

The class is presented with the poem in full, through a reading by the teacher (perhaps this is best done with the pupils just *listening*). This first reading is most important – it is the pupils' first contact with the poem, and it is at this point that their interest must be captured. The teacher's role here is, in essence, to interpret the poem through his reading so that even if the pupils do not understand everything, they can at least grasp the general drift and mood. It is a good idea to practise beforehand, into a tape recorder or a willing friend. What is important is that the teacher thinks about the poem carefully before taking it into the classroom so that he knows what expressiveness is required.

If it is possible, the playing of a recording can help rouse the interest of the class and allow the teacher to give a better reading than may be possible live. If the school has a tape recorder or record player (regrettably sometimes not the case, even though these are basic tools for the English work), organizations like the British Council often prove good sources of materials to use, not only for poems but also of songs. If there is no suitable recorded material available, the taping of the teacher (and/or friends) with appropriate sound effects can make a poem more interesting.

- 2 After the initial presentation, the teacher briefly tests that the class has understood the main ideas in the poem.
- 3 The class now goes through the poem in greater detail, after another reading by the teacher. Pupils ask questions about aspects of the poem which puzzle them, and the teacher acts as a guide to discussion, helping to draw the pupils' attention to key ideas and phrases through questioning. This questioning by the teacher is not principally for testing but for teaching purposes.

It is possible that a variety of ideas and interpretations may emerge during this discussion. Such differences should be accepted, indeed welcomed, if the pupils are genuinely trying to work out the poem for themselves. The slightly more difficult poems may lend themselves to differing interpretations, there may be areas of ambiguity to which there are not easy answers, and although it is tempting to impose a definite view of the poem (and perhaps, indeed, the pupils may demand one from the teacher) it is sometimes right to admit these varieties and uncertainties.

This is not to say, however, that everything which the pupils say should be accepted – ideas should be examined and, if wrong, rejected. The pupils look to the teacher for guidance and, without laying down the law about the poem on summarily dismissing what the pupils say, this is what he should give them. Mistakes should be corrected, usually by throwing them back to class for closer examination by the pupils themselves.

- 4 After this detailed work, the class is now ready to hear the poem in full again, so that the points raised and discussed can be brought together in a deeper understanding of the whole poem. Only when the teacher is satisfied that the pupils do understand the poem should he move on to related work such as drama or choral reading. Generally, therefore, these activities would come at the end of the work on a poem.

Activities such as drama and choral reading have a considerable value in helping the pupils become directly involved in poetry and, where they can be suitably applied, are further aids to learning. It is remarkable how alive a class can become once it begins something like the acting out of a poem! Some detailed suggestions for these activities are given in the Additional Teaching Notes at the end of the book.

Activities

Among the many possibilities of further work after the initial poetry reading and discussion are:

- 1 Arising from the work on the poem directly, the class discusses related personal experiences in some detail. This is a most valuable way of using classtime for various reasons:

- a. the skill of intelligent discussion is important in itself and should be encouraged;
 - b. the pupils are, starting from the poem, made to observe and consider aspects of their world, and so develop their awareness of their own experiences;
 - c. the telling of personal stories by the teacher and pupils, as well as being part of normal human concourse, helps them to get to know each other a little better;
 - d. such discussion can be the starting point for written work;
 - e. poetry is shown to be personally meaningful.
- 2 Pupils read aloud, after having been prepared. This may be individual or choral reading. Note the emphasis on the need for preparation -- picking on someone and demanding that he reads aloud when he is unwilling or unready can be harmful and cruel, and almost certainly a waste of the pupils' time.

The advantage of choral over individual reading is, of course, that it involves everyone, and it does provide practice in speech skills, especially stress and intonation. There are, however, certain things which should be kept in mind concerning choral reading.

- a. Not all poems are suitable. In essence, it is those which have a clear, often repetitive, pattern of rhythm which are best.
 - b. To avoid it degenerating into mere noise, firm control is needed. The best guarantee of controlled reading is that the class knows clearly what it is doing and is reading with understanding. Without such understanding, the result will be sound-making rather than spoken expression.
 - c. Choral reading can become rather monotonous if it is done with no variety. It is often a good idea to break the class up into small units and to get particular parts of the poem read by these separate groups. The contrast of a single voice against a group can be effective. Variety of pitch, pace and volume is sometimes important. Without such understanding, the result will be sound-making rather than spoken expressiveness.
 - d. Particular attention should be paid to the mood, rhythm and form of the poem. Class discussion on the lines: 'What is the best way of reading this poem so that we can bring out its meaning clearly?' is useful, as it helps to force the pupils to think carefully about points such as these.
3. Pupils act out small dramas based on the poems. This can be a simple mime of actions described in the poem; the acting out of stories in poetry; or a developing into improvised drama, where the pupils build up their own play with the poem as their starting point. Acting is not only great fun, it also has a very practical value and purpose in that it

- aids understanding through *demonstration*.
4. Poems can be read as an extended project on a theme. This is a good way of connecting different poems and of pursuing ideas which the class finds interesting. See the thematic index at the end of this Introduction.
 5. Poems are put together into a complete programme for performance to the rest of the class or school by an interested group of pupils. This can be a combination of readings, short plays, and singing.
 6. Pupils can collect extra poems and illustrate them, as well as illustrating the poems in this book.
 7. Pupils can write their own poems, stimulating by what they read in class. See the section 'Writing Poetry' in this Introduction.

Taking up some of these ideas, developing them, adding others, should make poetry an exciting and eagerly-appreciated part of the English work. At the very least, poetry should come into the classroom once a week or fortnight, though not necessarily at a fixed, regular time. Poetry can, however, be presented at *any* time and the more informally it is accepted as part of the English course, the better. Often a poem will not require a whole period, and if that is the time set aside for poetry, it is a good idea to use the forty minutes or so for related work or the reading of several poems. Sometimes a spare ten minutes at the end of a period can be used for reading a short poem. Once a class has started reading poetry and has come to enjoy particular poems, the pupils will happily accept an invitation to finish a lesson by re-reading such a favourite. There is certainly no need to feel that once a poem has been read it is finished with. The appreciation of poetry is something which grows with repeated readings. After the first presentation, come back to a poem later, either as a shared experience of pleasure through familiarity, or as an opportunity for finding new things missed out the first time. If, at the end of the secondary course, the pupils have been exposed to and have come to love a store of poetry, the teacher has justification for feeling proud of himself/herself.

Writing poetry

The writing of poetry by pupils is another part of English work which is often ignored by teachers, sometimes even by those who happily read poems with their classes. This seems a pity, as such writing can give great pleasure to the pupils, and what they write can be most satisfying. Often one finds that pupils who are not usually good at writing can write well in verse form. Perhaps they find it a freer medium of expression than the formal 'composition' and feel that poetry is a more personal form of writing. It is

not unusual for a pupil to approach the teacher who has shown a sympathy for poetry with a scrap of paper on which is a poem – it can happen that such a pupil is, at the moment, offering something of himself, something which can otherwise be hidden in the routine of ordinary class-writing. It is something that he wanted to write, about an experience which is important to him. Because of this, it is often a piece of writing done with real care.

If the pupils are to write poetry, they should not be expected to devise their own strict metre or rhyme schemes. Free-verse is the obvious and natural form, with the emphasis on precision and vividness of expression and a development of thought.

In preparing a class for writing, the teacher should not give a list of special words and tell the class to use them because they are good. He may, however, stimulate the class into thinking carefully about what they are to write, and then give specific help to the individuals or group as they write. The important thing is to *focus the pupils' imaginations on what they are to write about*, and to do this one must specify that situation. A command: 'Write a poem about an animal' will probably be met by a roomful of blank or fearful faces; the writing will probably be crude and generalized. What animal? Are there any personal experiences we can draw on? What characteristic physical details or forms of behaviour can we think of? What are our feelings towards the animal? Questions like these, selected and developed in some detail, should generate many ideas and help the pupils focus their attention on their subject. If the class is made to think in specific terms, the pupils' imaginations can be fully aroused and the language used can be more sharply concentrated.

Where do we begin? Well, it is possible to give the class freedom at this point. Many teachers, however, would like to start an activity like poetry writing with some degree of control. One obvious way of doing this – and also helping to train the pupils in keeping their minds on essentials – is to limit the length of poem to be written. Even a three-line poem can be marvellously effective, as Japanese haiku poetry shows. If we take such poetry as our model, we do not need to worry about the technicalities of what 'haiku' means but merely stress that the pupils are limited to three lines and that within that space they should capture a single observation, description, or mood, in simple, direct language. What is required is a clear, sharp picture in precise language.

Here are some examples written by Nigerian students:

Caught in the rain

- 1 With my tools ready to farm,
Is this the roar of an engine?
Ah I am wet.

- 2 Seek me in vain,
For I am at the farm
Stranded by the raindrops.
- 3 Busy sleeping under the tree,
I feel ice falling on me
Like broken prayer beads.
- 4 Away from the house in a gorgeous dress;
Turned back with a sign
When caught in the rain.

Eating a mango

- 1 Sucking, sucking, as if a baby being fed;
Then suddenly I find –
A yellow drop on my beautiful white shirt.
- 2 In hot season,
Walking in the heat of the desert
Fresh mango fruit in hand.
- 3 Juicy little fruit;
I take a bite and
Ugh! fibres stick between my teeth.

As can be seen from these examples, even if a single theme is set for the class to consider, the result will be very varied. Once the idea of the haiku has been established, of course, the class may be given greater freedom on what they write. Here are some on themes chosen by the students themselves.

Distance

Distance is the bitterest taste in love;
It either makes the heart grow fonder
Or take another lover.

Mother with child

Just like a dream
I saw her with
A lovely child on her back

Leper

The grown man on his seat
Can't stand for his limbs
Are reduced to stumps.

The poem can be extended:

Poem

In an unknown land I am;
No brother to advise me,
No father and mother and
The sister I had has gone to her grave.
Deserted am I, in an unknown land.

Little lies

A little lie,
A little truth,
Perhaps the best way to keep together.
For truth sometimes hurt like lies
And it is, perhaps, not always best to reveal all.
Do keep a little now and again –
For only in this way can we save our fun.

Once pupils have gained sense of confidence in what they write, and feel that their poems are accepted, it is quite possible that they will write on themes which concern them deeply as individuals, thereby giving themselves the chance to express personal fears, thoughts and experiences, and in so doing help to give shape to these. Such honesty in writing can only come when the teacher is respectful of what the pupils write. Probably the best incentive to a pupil to write, and to write well and truthfully, is the presence of a teacher who is willing to read.

Another kind of control which may be used at the beginning is for the pupils to work from a poem which they have read, using that as a model for their own work. The simplest form of this is straight substitution and addition – the pupil takes the pattern of the poem he has read and changes parts or builds upon it with added verses of his own. Several poems in this collection have a firm, easily recognized form which may be used in this way. Such a process of substitution has its main value in helping pupils to gain confidence in presenting their own ideas and phrases because the framework is already given by the model-poem. It is a perfectly respectable aspect of folk-poetry, when the individual takes a poem and changes it, builds on it as he wishes. The danger, however, is that the pupils work entirely in an imitative or mechanical way. Fairly early in any poetry course, the teacher should encourage a greater degree of freedom and originality in the pupils' work.

Poems also acts as 'models' in the sense that they offer a starting-point for the pupils' own thinking about a subject, even if they do not keep closely to the original in detail and phrasing (which indeed is not something the teacher should particularly want.) It is perhaps realistic to accept that some

degree of copying may be evident in the early stages of writing (we are all necessarily influenced in what we write by our reading), but pupils should try to find out their own voices, as it were. This cannot be done if the teacher is too restrictive because he refuses to allow controlled writing to develop into free expression.

So, in sum, poetry is a worthwhile part of the work in writing. Often one comes along delightfully striking ideas and phrases, such as this ending to a love poem written by a Nigerian boy:

... I lie on my bed and
Thoughts fill my mind
Whether you bribed God
Before he created you.

Poetry often reveals a creativity in the pupils which can, unhappily, be overlooked in the routine of 'Weekly Composition', but does not exist and which enriches the experience of teaching.

To conclude this section, here are a couple of examples of extended free verse written by Ugandan pupils. The first was written by a third-year pupil during a project on animals. We had read several poems and had talked about animals found around the school compound. The agama gama lizard is the largish lizard often found warming itself on rocks and walls, the males brightly coloured red or blue. The poem shows a fine control of language and provides several details which indicates that the pupil had truly *observed* the animal. It was a poem worth reading and sharing with the class:

Agama Gama Lizard

There, in the soft, moist, fertile ground,
the mother makes a deep hole
in which she deposits her eggs and
does not stay around.

She gives her eggs a last service
by covering.

Then off she goes with a revived, new
life and does not think about them.

After two or three weeks the young ones
hatch.

They are very active and lively.

They disappear into the bushes to grow.

They search for their lunch dishes
among the brightly coloured bushes.

A dozen or more will be found
basking and roasting in the sun.

their heads keep nodding up and down,

as if saying yes, yes, to
everything.

The female has dull greyish
 brown colour,
 which shows she is not vain.
 Her long loose tail is like
 a whip that can be left
 behind in time of danger.
 Her bright, deep eyes can fascinate
 anybody.
 The male, in his brightly coloured
 coat of rainbow colours,
 goes about enticing the females.
 He has his territory and is
 cruel to anyone who trespasses on it.
 Have you ever seen him attack
 his enemy?
 Oh, it is very interesting to watch.
 He uses his large tail to thrust
 at his enemy.
 The enemy will take to his heels
 and never think of trespassing again.

The next poem was written by an older student. It is a considerably more sophisticated piece of writing, and, of course, not representative of the kind of poetry we would expect to receive from pupils in Forms 1-3. The assurance with which it is written is due, in some part at least, to a background of poetry reading and writing which stimulated the student into exploring themes and language. Poetry increasingly became the form in which he expressed the most important things he wanted to say. It was interesting to watch the way that his experiments in poetry helped him to formulate and shape his thoughts and feelings. The essentially simple statements in this poem come across with vividness and conviction. One cannot help thinking that it was sincerity of feeling rather than self-conscious cleverness, that 'selected' the words, images and form of this poem.

I woke up . . .

I woke up and as slumber oozed out of me,
 Memory floated back to the old days. And I remembered
 Myself - young and innocent - free.
 Sometimes I used to laugh
 Sometimes I used to cry.
 Both with good intentions.
 But now the world has his ravages on me.
 I feel sour when I lick my wounds
 Inflicted on me without cause, except
 Perhaps the old curse of Adam.
 Old days were full of delight, pleasure, joy.
 I can see my mother patting me fondly on the cheek,

Suckling me with grace and tenderness.
Were it possible, I would go backwards like a crab
And escape this cruel world.
I feel lost, derelict – a stranger in this world.
Were it possible, I would grow young again.
Ah, but scars cannot be covered.

Themes

Here are set out groups of poems in this book according to theme. The teacher can use this as a reference to some of the topics that may be dealt with in discussion or written work, it will also help in planning project work. This groups are by no means exhaustive.

Children's verse

There's a hole in my bucket, 2; Bread-fruit, 3; There was an old woman, 4; You, 5

Narratives

To the anxious mother, 32; Kariuki, 33; W-o-o-o-o-ww!!, 46;
Farmer's boy, 54; The old wood-seller, 58; The fog, 61; Sorghum, 70;
Bishop Hatto, 72; Hasana's lover, 73

People/Character studies

There's a hole in my bucket, 2; There was an old woman, 4; Song to a miser, 9; Lazy man's song, 10; The lazy man, 11; A genuine gentleman, 12; The irresponsible student, 24; Blaming sons, 25; Alampambo, 29; A bus ride, 31; Grandpa, 34; On a tired housewife, 35; The troubled warrior, 36; An old Jamaican woman thinks about hereafter, 51; Farmer's boy, 54; The herdsboy's misery, 55; The old wood-seller, 58; African beggar, 59; The blind man, 60; The fog, 61; Bishop Hatto, 72; Hasana's lover, 73

Scenes around the village

The lazy man, 11; He leaves the nest, 16; A sudden storm, 22; The market, 27; The market-place in the north, 28; They walked and talked, 30; An African thunderstorm, 68; Sorghum, 70

Childhood and youth

Lullabies, 7; A sudden storm, 22; The irresponsible student, 24; The market-place in the north, 28; To the anxious mother, 32; Kariuki, 33; The troubled warrior, 36; Wild oats, 53; Farmer's boy, 54; The

herdsboy's misery, 55; Young shepherd bathing his feet, 69; Hasana's lover, 73

Old people

Blaming sons, 25; Kariuki, 33; Grandpa, 34; An old Jamaican woman thinks about the hereafter, 51; The old wood-seller, 58

Home

Lullabies, 7; Carry me, 8; To the anxious mother, 32; On a tired housewife, 35; An old Jamaican woman thinks about the hereafter, 51; Home, 52; Wild oats, 53

Gatherings

Tribal dance, 26; The market, 27; The market-place in the north, 28; They walked and talked, 30; A bus ride, 31; To the anxious mother, 32; Kariuki, 33; Song for the dead, 42; Jamaican bus ride, 50; Sorghum, 70

On the land

A time to talk, 13; Praise songs the wind, 21; A newly-born calf, 45; Farmer's boy, 54; The herdsboy's misery, 55; Nature, 65; The rain-man's praise-song of himself, 66; The dry season, 67; Young shepherd bathing his feet, 69; Sorghum, 70

Laziness

Lazy man's song, 10; The lazy man, 11; Praise songs the wind, 21; The irresponsible student, 24

Work

A time to talk, 13; On a tired housewife, 35; Farmer's boy, 54; The herdsboy's misery, 55; The old wood-seller, 58; Sorghum, 70

Poverty and riches

Lullabies, 7; Song to a miser, 9; A genuine gentleman, 12; Alampambo, 29; An old Jamaican woman thinks about the hereafter, 51; Home, 52; The herdsboy's misery, 55; Banks of marble, 56; All's dear but poor man's labour, 57; The old wood-seller, 58; African beggar, 59; A deserted palm tree, 64

Happiness and contentment

Lullabies, 7; An old Jamaican woman thinks about the hereafter, 51; Home, 52; Young shepherd bathing his feet, 69; Sorghum, 70

Unhappiness and hardship

A lament at the marriage of a friend, 6; Hunger, 23; The market-place in the north, 28; On a tired housewife, 35; The troubled warrior, 36; Two songs from Dahomey, 41; The herdsboy's misery, 55; Banks of marble, 56; All's dear but poor man's labour, 57; The old wood-seller, 58; African begger, 59; The blind man, 60; A deserted palm tree, 64; Bishop Hatto, 72; Hasana's lover, 73

Friendship and love

A lament at the marriage of a friend, 6; Lullabies, 7; A time to talk, 13; The market-place in the north, 28; They walked and talked, 30; To the anxious mother, 32; Home, 52; Hasana's lover, 73

Insult and blame

You, 5; Song to a miser, 9; They ran out of mud, 20; The irresponsible student, 24; Blaming sons, 25; Grandpa, 34; On a tired housewife, 35; Bishop Hatto, 72

Eating and drinking

There was an old woman, 4; The lazy man, 11; Hunger, 23; The irresponsible student, 24; Blaming sons, 25; Tribal dance, 26; Song for the dead, 42; Sorghum, 70; The song of the bottle, 71

Hunting

Kob antelope, 43; The buffalo, 44; Elephant song, 47; Lone dog, 49

Animals and birds

Song of the animal world, 14; The snake song, 15; He leaves the nest, 16; Oliphaunt, 17; Kob antelope, 43; The buffalo, 44; A newly-born calf, 45; W-o-o-o-c-o-ww!!, 46; Elephant song, 47; Chameleon, 48; Lone dog, 49; Frogs, 62; Bats, 63

Weather

Praise song of the wind, 21; A sudden storm, 22; 'To the Sun-god', 41; Nature, 65; The rain-man's praise-song of himself, 66; The Dry Season, 67; An African thunderstorm, 68

The supernatural

Ololu - an Egungun, 38; Superstition, 39; You will walk in peace, 40; Bishop Hatto, 72; Hasana's lover, 73

God

Bread-fruit, 3; A chain-rhyme, 18; Prayer before the dead body, 19; Fulani story of creation, 37; Songs from Dahomey, 41

Afterlife

Prayer before the dead body, 19; On a tired housewife, 35; Song for the dead, 42; An old Jamaican woman thinks about the hereafter, 51

Traditional poetry

Throughout the anthology there are examples of traditional poetry, especially from Africa. These could be used as a starting-point for a collecting and examining of oral poetry from the areas where the pupils live. The teachers should help the pupils to realize that they have a rich cultural heritage which gives expression to the experience and wisdom of traditional African life. A study of the poetry in the indigenous language would make a firm foundation for their experience of poetry. Arising from poems in this collection could come work on riddles, proverbs, children's verse and songs, lullabies, religious poetry, character and animal studies, and folk tales.

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72 38 *Ololu – an Egungun* Yetunde Esan
74 39 *Superstition* Minji Karibo
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78 Proverb
79 43 *Kob Antelope* traditional Yoruba
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Riddles and Proverbs

Riddles are a special kind of puzzle where something is described in an unusual way and you have to try to work out what the thing is from the description. They are a common and popular part of traditional literature. Try to collect some from your own language, and even make some up yourself! See if you can work out the answers to these riddles, taken from parts of Africa.

What are these?

- 1 The black one is squatting – the red one is licking his bottom.
- 2 I am a great soldier. One of my enemies is water; if it chases me, I can destroy the largest city in the world.
- 3 A lake with reeds all round.
- 4 A snake that breathes smoke.
- 5 I've got a wife: once she goes from me she never comes back.
- 6 The large black bird that sits and has sweet intestines.
- 7 A beautiful lady in a thorny bush.
- 8 My child is always travelling and does not rest.

Proverbs are short sayings that express a truth or a common belief. In many parts of Africa, a person who can make good use of proverbs is often considered very wise as this shows that he has a knowledge of traditional wisdom and knows how to express it. Chinua Achebe, in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, quotes the Igbo saying: 'Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.' Try to work out these other proverbs, and then perhaps collect some sayings from your own language:

- 1 A child that never visits other homes will think his mother the best cook.
- 2 An old woman crushed a ripe banana and boasted that her strength would be the death of her.
- 3 The child who is always crying will cry in vain when a snake bites it.
- 4 A short man hangs his bag where his hand can reach it.
- 5 The one who is left behind says, 'They are waiting for me.'

There's a Hole in my Bucket

There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza, 1
 There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole.

Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
 Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, fix it.

With what shall I fix it, dear Liza, dear Liza? 5
 With what shall I fix it, dear Liza, with what?

With a straw, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
 With a straw, dear Henry, dear Henry, with a straw.

But the straw is too long, dear Liza, dear Liza,
 But the straw is too long, dear Liza, too long. 10

Then cut it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
 Then cut it, dear Henry, dear Henry, cut it.

With what shall I cut it, dear Liza, dear Liza?
 With what shall I cut it, dear Liza, with what?

With a knife, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry; 15
 With a knife, dear Henry, dear Henry, with a knife.

But the knife is too blunt, dear Liza, dear Liza,
 But the knife is too blunt, dear Liza, too blunt.

Then sharpen it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
 Then sharpen it, dear Henry, dear Henry, sharpen it. 20

With what shall I sharpen it, dear Liza, dear Liza?
 With what shall I sharpen it, dear Liza, with what?

With a stone, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
 With a stone, dear Henry, dear Henry, with a stone.

But the stone is too dry, dear Liza, dear Liza, 25
But the stone is too dry, dear Liza, too dry.

Then wet it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
Then wet it, dear Henry, dear Henry, wet it.

With what shall I wet it, dear Liza, dear Liza?
With what shall I wet it, dear Liza, with what? 30

Try water, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
Try water, dear Henry, dear Henry, try water.

In what shall I fetch it, dear Liza, dear Liza?
In what shall I fetch it, dear Liza, in what?

In a bucket, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry; 35
In a bucket, dear Henry, dear Henry, in a bucket.

There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,
There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole.

traditional American

3

Bread-fruit

(Where there is a line, put in someone's name.)

What happened to _____? 1

Aicc, _____!

Bread-fruit crushed _____.

Aicc, _____!

What happened to Bread-fruit? 5

Splinter split Bread-fruit,

Bread-fruit crushed _____.

Aicc, _____!

What happened to splinter?
Fire burned splinter, 10
Splinter split Bread-fruit,
Bread-fruit crushed _____
Aice, _____!

What happened to fire?
Water quenched fire, 15
Fire burned splinter,
Splinter split Bread-fruit,
Bread-fruit crushed _____
Aice, _____!

What happened to water? 20
Goat drank water,
Water quenched fire,
Fire burned splinter,
Splinter split Bread-fruit,
Bread-fruit crushed _____ 25
Aice, _____!

What happened to goat?
Death killed goat,
Goat drank water,
Water quenched fire, 30
Fire burned splinter,
Splinter split Bread-fruit,
Bread-fruit crushed _____
Aice, _____!

What created death? 35
God created death,
Death killed goat,
Goat drank water,
Water quenched fire,
Fire burned splinter, 40
Splinter split Bread-fruit,
Bread-fruit crushed _____
Aice, _____!

traditional Igbo

bread-fruit: the large, round fruit of tropical tree. When baked, it looks and tastes like bread.

There was an Old Woman

There was an old woman who swallowed a fly; 1
 I don't know why
 She swallowed a fly.
 Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a spider 5
 That wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
 She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
 I don't know why
 She swallowed a fly.
 Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a bird:
 How absurd!
 To swallow a bird!
 She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
 That wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. 15
 She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
 I don't know why
 She swallowed a fly.
 Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a cat; 20
 Fancy that!
 She swallowed a cat!
 She swallowed the cat to catch the bird;
 She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
 That wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. 25
 She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
 I don't know why
 She swallowed a fly.
 Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a dog: 30
What a hog!
She swallowed a dog!
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat;
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird;
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider 35
That wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why
She swallowed a fly.
Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a cow:
I wonder how
She swallowed a cow!
She swallowed the cow to catch the dog;
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat; 45
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird;
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why 50
She swallowed a fly.
Poor old woman, perhaps she'll die.

There was an old woman who swallowed a horse:
She died, of course!

traditional American

- 12 *How absurd!* : How silly!
13 *Fancy that!* : is an expression of surprise.
31 *What a hog!* : *hog* here means a very greedy person.

You

You!

Your head is like a drum that is beaten for spirits.

You!

Your ears are like the fans used for blowing fires.

You!

Your nostril is like a mouse's den.

You!

Your nostril is like a mouse's den.

You!

Your hands are like drum-sticks.

You!

Your belly is like a pot of rotten water.

You!

Your legs are like stakes.

You!

Your buttocks ate like mountain top.

traditional Igbo

6 *den* : where the mouse lives.

8 *mould* : small hill.

14 *stakes* : lengths of wood that are fixed into the ground.

A Lament at the Marriage of a Friend

This is a song which young Basoga girls, from Uganda, sing when one of their friends gets married. They imagine that they are the bride and list the difficulties which she – supposedly – will have to face at the house of her in-laws. In this way they express their feelings of sadness at losing their friend. (A lament is a song of sadness.)

The house, I am worried about the house!	I
The house, I am worried about the house!	
The house, where they say you are a thief!	
The house, where they say you are poor!	
The house, I am worried about the house!	5
The house, where they say you are foolish!	
The house, where they say you are jealous of my being loved!	
The house, where they say I am unwanted	
The house, I am worried about the house!	
The house, I am worried about my escaping!	10
The house, I am worried about my going!	

traditional Basoga

What are the fears of the bride which the song mentions?
Do you think these fears are reasonable?

Two Traditional Lullabies

A heart to hate you
Is as far away as the moon
A heart to love you
Is as close as the door.

from Burundi

Song to a Miser

Eskimos, like Africans, particularly dislike someone who is mean and selfish. This song was composed against such a person. It was discovered that he used to get meat from his store when everyone else was asleep, so that he could eat it by himself without offering any to others. As soon as he had finished, he wrapped the remains up and hid them. This clever little poem is to rebuke that man. When he heard it, he felt so ashamed of himself that he never ate alone again.

I
5

I put some words together,
I made a little song,
I took it home one evening,
mysteriously wrapped, disguised.
Underneath my bed it went:
nobody was going to share it,
nobody was going to taste it!
I wanted it for me! me! me!
Secret, undivided!

traditional Eskimo

translated by T. Lowenstein

Lazy Man's Song

I could have a job, but am too lazy to choose it; 1
 I have got may land, but am too lazy to farm it.
 My house leaks, I am too lazy to mend it.
 My clothes are torn, I am too lazy to darn them.
 I have got wine, but I am too lazy to drink; 5
 So it's just the same as if my cup were empty.
 I have got a lute, but am too lazy to play;
 So it's just the same as if it had not strings.
 My family tells me there is no more steamed rice;
 I want to cook, but am too lazy to grind. 10
 My friends and relatives write me long letters;
 I should like to read them, but they're such a bother to open.
 I have been told that His Shu-Yeh
 Passed his whole life in absolute idleness,
 But he even played his lute and sometimes worked at his 15
 forge;
 So even he was not as lazy as I.

Chinese; translated by Arthur Waley

10 *to grind* here means to rub the grains of rice, to make the smooth.

15 *forge* : a place where metal is heated and forged.

What are the results of this man's laziness?

Does he care?

II

Lazy Man

When the cock crows
the lazy man smacks his lips and says: 1
'So it's daylight again, is it?'
And before he turns over heavily,
before he even stretches himself, 5
before he even yawns –
the farmer reaches the farm,
the water-carriers arrived at the river,
the spinners are spinning their cotton,
the weaver works on his cloth, 10
and the fire blazes in the blacksmith's hut.

The lazy man knows where the soup is sweet;
he goes from house to house.
If there is no sacrifice today,
his breastbone will stick out! 15
But when he sees the free yam,
he starts to unbutton his shirt,
he moves close to the celebrants.

Yet his troubles are not few.
When his wives reach puberty, 20
Rich men will help him marry them.

traditional Yoruba

18 *celebrants* : the people at the feast.

20-21 These lines mean that the lazy man will lose his young wives when they are grown up.

How does this man live?

What problems does he face?

What do you think other people might think of a man like this?

A Genuine gentle man

A genuine gentleman is spick and span. 1
 He walks at ease with confidence in the marketplace.
 On the other hand, a dirty man is hesitant,
 And walks with a certain, sluggish gait.

Therefore, it's the dirty sluggish man who serves 5
 As the porter for the well-dressed gentleman.

When, by accident, a dirty sluggish man falls down
 In the marketplace, all spectators laugh at him;
 But when a gentleman accidentally falls,
 All spectators raise a shout of sympathy. 10

Only a dunce does not know
 That a handsome man is never made
 To bear the load masquerading dress
 For the masquerader's festival, 'Odun Egungun'.
 This is because his teeth, being glittering white, 15
 Will betray the secret that all Egungun
 Are men disguised with masks, veils and shroudy suits.

Adeboye Babalola

1 *spick and span* : clean and tidy.

4 *sluggish* : lazy.

14 *Odun Egungun* : a Yoruba festival in which men dress up in masks and white clothes ('shroudy suits') to represent spirits.

How does a 'gentleman' look?

How does he move?

What do others think of him?

Why does a 'gentleman' never take part in Odun Egungun?

A Time to Talk

When a friend calls to me from the road 1
 And slows his horse for a meaning walk,
 I don't stand still and look around
 On all the hills I haven't hoed,
 And shout from where I am, 'What is it?' 5

No, not as there is a time to talk.
 I thrust my hoe on the mellow ground,
 Blade-end up five feet tall,
 And plod: I go to the stone wall
 For a friendly visit. 10

Robert Frost

7 *mellow* : soft and fertile.

What is the farmer doing when his friend approaches?

What are the two ways that the friend shows when he wants to talk?

What does the farmer do?

Three more riddles

What are these?

- 1 How strange! Water turned into bone!
- 2 The golden loaf that feeds the whole world.
- 3 Although I stretch upwards with my yellow arms, I cant help growing shorter.

Song of the Animal world

This traditional pygmy poem is a celebration of the living world through words and actions. The reader of the solo parts should try to move like the animal being described.

<i>Solo:</i>	The fish goes . . .	<i>Chorus:</i>	Hip! 1
	The bird goes . . .		Viss!
	The monkey goes . . .		Gnan!

<i>Solo:</i>	<i>(with actions)</i> I jump to the left, I turn to the right, I am being the fish That slips through the water, that slips, That twists and springs!	5
--------------	---	---

Everything lives, everything dances, everything chirps . . .

<i>Solo:</i>	The fish . . .	<i>Chorus:</i>	Hip! 10
	The bird . . .		Viss!
	The monkey . . .		Gnan!

<i>Solo:</i>	<i>(with actions)</i> The bird flies away, Flies, flies, flies, Goes, comes back, passes Rises, floats, swoops, I'm being the bird.
--------------	--

Everything lives, everything dances, everything chirps . . .

<i>Solo:</i>	The fish . . .	<i>Chorus:</i>	Hip!
	The bird . . .		Viss! 20
	The monkey . . .		Gnan!

Solo: *(with actions)*

The monkey – from branch to branch,
He runs hops, jumps,
With his wife and his brat,
His mouth stuffed full, his tail in
the air,
Here's the monkey, here's the monkey!

25

Everything lives, everything dances, everything chirps ...

Solo: The fish ...
The bird ...
The monkey ...

Chorus: Hip! 10
Viss!
Gnan!

traditional Pygmy

15

The Snake Song

Neither legs nor arms have I 1
But I crawl on my belly
And I have
Venom, venom, venom!

Neither horns nor hoofs have I 5
But I spit with my tongue
And I have
Venom, venom, venom!

Neither bows nor gun have I
But I flash fast with my tongue 10
And I have
Venom, venom, venom!

Neither radar nor missiles have I
But I stare with my eyes
And I have 15
Venom, venom, venom!

I master every moment
For I jump, run and swim
And I spit
Venom, venom, venom!

20

John Mbiti

Venom : the poison which some snakes have. It also means spite, or a feeling of hate.

13 *radar nor missiles* : these are things used in modern war. Radar finds objects which cannot be actually seen; and missiles are rockets, weapons which fly through the air.

16

He Leaves the Nest

He leaves the nest; 1

And flaps his wings;

And stops bit by bit,

He makes his way 5

To the top of tree:

And,

His neck up,

His tail up,

His foot up, 10

His comb up,

The cock lifts

His voice up,

And

Crows 15

Sankrit poem;

translated by John Brough

3 *struts* : walks as if he is important.

11 *comb* : the red piece of flesh on top of a chicken's head.

Oliphaunt

The name 'Oliphaunt' is one invented by the writer for the strange and wonderful creature described in this poem: it is, of course, the elephant (which is, indeed, a curious and extraordinary animal). Some of the details given in the poem are based on old legends about the elephant, such as the claims it never lies down or dies. Although untrue, these details help to create a powerful creature, which even in real life does seem mythical and supernatural.

Grey as a mouse,	I
Big as a house,	
Nose like a snake,	
I make the earth shake,	
As I tramp through the grass;	5
Trees crack as I pass.	
With horns in my mouth	
I walk in the South,	
Flapping big ears,	
Beyond count of years	10
I stump round and round,	
Never lie on the ground,	
Not even to die.	
Oliphaunt am I,	
Biggest of all,	15
Huge, old and tall.	
If ever you'd met me.	
You'd never forget me.	
If ever you do,	
You won't think I am true;	20
But Old Oliphaunt am I,	
And never die.	

J. R. R. Tolkien

10 Oliphaunt is so old that no one is able to work out his age.

What words or phrases in the poem give us a physical description of the elephant?

How does the elephant move?

Why does the elephant say that even if you see him, you won't think that he is real?

A Chain-rhyme

This poem tells you how to overcome particular problems.
What does the last line tell us about God?

If a jackal bothers you, show him a hyena, 1
 If a hyena bothers you, show him a lion,
 If a lion bothers you, show him an elephant,
 If an elephant bothers you, show him a hunter,
 If a hunter bothers you, show him a snake, 5
 If a snake bothers you, show him a stick,
 If a sick bothers you, show it a fire,
 If a fire bothers you, show it a river,
 If a river bothers you, show it a wind,
 If a wind bothers you, show it God,

traditional Fulani

They ran out of Mud

There is a little hut 1
 Built across from here;
 They've mudded two walls
 But the rest stands undone –
 They ran out of mud. 5

There is a deep gully
 Running along the road;
 They've filled halfway
 But the rest is still gaping –
 They ran out of mud. 10

There's a pot by the altar
 That they began to mould;
 They finished the base
 But the neck is unmade –
 They ran out of mud. 15

Mud! Mud!
 Who can find mud?
 Maybe if it were gold
 Someone would.

Miriam Khamadi

What happened when 'they ran out of mud'?
 Why, do you think, they ran out of mud?
 Which is more valuable – mud or gold? Why?

Praise-song of the Wind

Trees with weak roots
I will strike, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Haycocks built today
I will scatter, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Badly made haycocks
I will carry off, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Uncovered stacks of sheaves
I will soak through, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Houses not tightly roofed
I will destroy, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Hay piled in sheds
I will tear apart, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Fire kindled in the road
I will set flickering, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

Houses with bad smoke-holes
I will shake, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

The farmer who does not think
I will strike, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

The worthless slug-a-bed
I will strike, I the wind.
I will roar, I will whistle.

30

*Siberian poem; translated by
W. Radloff and W. R. Trask*

- 4 *haycocks* : conical heaps of hay.
10 *stacks* : large heaps or piles.
10 *sheaves* : bundles of stalks from crops such as hay.
19 *kindled* : set alight.
22 *smoke-holes* : holes in the roofs of houses for the smoke from the fires to go out through.

Why is the wind being praised? What is its effect?

A Sudden Storm

1

The wind howls, the trees sway,
 The loose house-top sheets clatter and clang,
 The open window shuts with a bang,
 And the sky makes night of day.

5

Helter-skelter the parents run,
 Pressed with a thousand minor cares:
 'Hey, you there! pack the household wares!
 And where on earth's my son?'

10

Home skip the little children:
 'Where have you been, you naughty boy?' –
 The child can feel nothing but joy,
 For he loves the approach of the rain.

15

The streets clear, the houses fill,
 The noise gathers as children shout
 To rival the raging wind without,
 And nought that can move still –

20

A bright flash! – a lighted plain;
 Then from the once-blue heavens,
 Accompanied by noise that deafens,
 Steadily pours the rain.

Pius Oleghe

5 *Helter-skelter* : in a confused way.

6 *Pressed* : troubled.

14 *gathers* : increases.

16 *nought* : old-fashioned word for 'nothing'.

This poem describes the start of a storm in a vivid way, so we can fully imagine the scene for ourselves. What are the sounds and sights at this time? How do objects and people move? How do the people behave? What happens while it is actually raining?

Some more riddles

- 1 The white tree that loses its bark in the sun.
- 2 A small room with 33 pillars.
- 3 The long snake runs fast but stays where it is.

23

Hunger

Hunger makes a person lie down – 1
he has water in his knees.
Hunger makes a person lie down –
and count the rafters in his roof.
Hunger will persuade the priest 5
to steal from his own shrine.
'I have eaten yesterday'
does not concern hunger.
There is no god like one's stomach:
We must sacrifice to it every day. 10

traditional Yoruba

- 7 This line is interesting in the clever way that the usual rules of English grammar have been twisted. In the standard English we never use the present perfect with a word like 'yesterday'. Can you work out why the poet has deliberately broken this rule? What would the phrase 'I have eaten' normally mean? Why could you not add 'yesterday' to it?

The Irresponsible Student

If you only knew 1
 the horror that is wine
 you would curse it.

They taught you to sing to the flute
 they taught you to lament to the shepherd's reed; 5
 they taught you to recite to the harp
 they taught you to sing praises to the zither.

You sit in the bar
 sit between harlots;
 you want to be aggressive. 10

You sit between girls
 steeped in fragrant ointment
 a wreath of flowers round your neck –
 you are drumming on your belly.

You sway, you fall on your face, 15
 you are covered in dirt.

traditional Egyptian

4-7 *Flute, reed, harp, zither* : these are all musical instruments.

12 *Fragrant ointment*: covered with sweet-smelling oil.

What kind of education has this student received?

What sort of person is he expected to be?

How does he, in fact, behave? What happens to him?

Tribal Dance

They sat in the shade of a cotton-silk tree 1
 Drinking palm wine
 And beating the drums
 They danced from noon
 Till half past three 5
 Drinking palm wine
 And beating drums.

And they slept in the shadows
 Till moon rose high
 Like a silver florin 10
 In a starry sky
 And they danced once again
 By the cotton-silk tree
 Drinking palm wine
 And beating the drums. 15

Drinking palm wine
 And beating the drums
 They sang the songs of their race
 And an old Tiv chieftain
 Raised in the head 20
 And moonlight shone on his face.

The moonlight shone
 On the old chief's face
 On the moonwhite gleam of his eyes
 And they sang with pride 25
 The songs of their race
 And saw the silver moon rise.

They sat in the shade of a cotton-silk tree
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums 30
They danced from noon
Till half past three
Drinking palm wine
And beating drums.

And they slept in the shadows 35
Till moon rose high
Like a silver florin
In a starry sky
And they danced once again
By the cotton-silk tree 40
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums.

Martin Brenman

19 *Tiv* : a person who live in the plateau area of central Nigeria.

The story of this communal meeting for drinking, dancing and singing is told in lines 1-27. The last lines are simply a repeat of the main details. How did these people spend their day?

Read the poem aloud and listen – can you hear the drums?

The Market

The marketplace is probably the most important area in any village or town in Africa. Market-day is not only the time for buying and selling, but also for meeting people, catching up on gossip, or simply walking around. It is a scene of colour, noise and activity:

The stalls are set in the marketplace,	1
And the clamour will soon begin;	
For crowding along,	
Come the motley throng,	
To join in the colourful din.	5
There seems to be every single thing	
That ever was born or made,	
In the teeming space	
Of the marketplace,	
Where people barter and trade.	10
Cabbages, carrots, tomatoes and beans,	
Set out in a fine display,	
With papers and fishes	
And gay-coloured dishes,	
To add to the bright array.	15
Tobacco and milk tins for measuring out	
The groundnuts and gari and rice,	
And you argue and chat,	
About this thing and that,	
Before you agree on the price.	20
There's a clattering buzz from the tailor's bench,	
Where shuttles are flying fast,	
And the cobbler's stall	
Has sandals for all	
To tempt you as you go past.	25
People are joyously greeting their friends,	
Whilst other folks squabble and shout,	
And the rest seem to push	
In the midst of the crush,	
To see what the uproar's about.	30
Oh, the market is set like the hub of a wheel,	
And it pulls like a magnet strong,	

The Marketplace in the North

Out in the sun amid the reds
 And greens of peppers and tomatoes
 Were the lovely Konkomba boys,
 Strong and straight as the teak;
 lovely boys,
 Carrying their bows on
 a slender shoulder
 And poisoned arrows in
 leather scabbards.
 They had come to buy pito and
 to show their bodies
 To the bare-bosomed girls
 of Navrongo.

It's all calm and quiet
 nowadays in the marketplace.
 The boys don't come anymore.
 But the girls still go there
 to look for them,
 Holding a flimsy hope
 to their hearts
 And a tear in their eyes.

Kwesi Brew

4 *teak* : a large, hardwood tree.

What impression does the poem give us of the Konkomba boys?
 What is the 'flimsy hope' which the girls have?
 Why are they sad?

Alampambo

On one of the crowded sidewalks 1
 of the Makola Market,
 once I came upon a man
 with a million-and-one stitches
 in his i-taya shirt and knickers. 5
 He smiled and smiled all the time.
 He had bowl with rings
 on the rim;
 and an old mouth organ
 which he blew into 10
 and danced to his song:

*Alampambo**hwee-hoo hwee-hoo**Alampambo**hwee-hoo hwee-hoo.* 15

This is a beggar,
 but he was a chooser;
 for he would dance
 only for three pesewas up
 given him in alms: 20

*Alampambo**hwee-hoo hwee-hoo**Alampambo**hwee-hoo hwee-hoo.*

He would stand at one end 25
 of a sidewalk stretch
 cleared of hawkers,
 raise up one arm
 to signify all-set-to-go,
 then smile, sing and blow 30
 into his beat-up mouth organ:

Alampambo

hwee-hoo hwee-hoo

Alampambo

hwee-hoo hwee-hoo.

35

With tens of people gathered

watching him

he would stop and dance

sideways along the sidewalk stretch,

manfully stamping the ground 40

on a jump-dance syncopated beat,

shaking his ring-rimmed bowl

and singing and blowing

into his old mouth organ:

Alampambo

hwee-hoo hwee-hoo

Alampambo

hwee-hoo hwee-hoo.

45

Kojo Gyinaye Kyei

19 *up* : or more.

41 *syncopated beat* : rhythm which is always changing; producing a lively dance beat.

In what ways is this beggar special or unusual?

What saying do lines 16–17 remind you of?

They Walked and Talked

They talked and walked, walked and talked and talked – talkative homing dames; Mothers, Grandmothers, all homing, returning from a distant mart baskets on heads, words on lips – gossip or tall tales of folk at home.	1 5
They clapped their hands; they screamed from time to time; they moved their hands in most expressive ways – their hands spoke even louder than their tongues – as they swept like a great Saharan wind along the winding beaten tracks before them, silent, deserted.	10
Not even the discordant croaking of the toad, not even the noise of insects here and there, not even the songs of birds everywhere, were heard above the noise of these homing folk who (forgetful of the ancient saying that even blades of grass are living ears) could not restrain their long and wagging tongues.	15 20

C. Uche Okeke

- 3 *homing dames* : women returning to their homes.
5 *mart* : a poetic way of saying 'market'.
15 *discordant* : unpleasant sounding.

A Bus Ride

Two ample women, somewhat past their primes 1
 (the man between lost in his *Daily Times*)
 discuss their friends for all the world to hear.
 Some seats away a gallant says. 'My dear'
 to a strange girl who glares at him. Uncowed 5
 he prattles on, oblivious of the crowd.
 On every side there's animated talk
 on the state, on the love – down to the price of pork.
 Some stare through the windows, hating all the noise,
 Stern-faced, like masters angry with their boys. 10
 The fop uneasy with the tramp beside
 fidgets and sighs and shifts from side to side.

A bus stops now.
 Sighs and farewells, legs and baskets,
 jostle in greatest confusion. 15
 The queue without stampedes and rushes
 t'increase the babel within.
 'Way please! 'Get in!' 'Abi na wetin!'
 'Ouch you hurt my toe!'

Time up! The conductor presses 'Go'. 20
 The hubbub continues. What does he care?
 The more the noisier, but the richer the fare!

U. I. Ukwuu

- 1 *somewhat past their primes* : rather elderly.
 4 *a gallant* : a man who gives a lot of attention to women.
 6 *prattles on* : continues to speak in a silly way.
 11 *fop* : a man who is in vain about his appearance.
 17 *babel* : scene of confused noise.
 18 *Abi na wetin!* = pidgin expression of irritation, meaning 'What is it?'

What is the general atmosphere of this bus ride?
 What words describe this?
 What are the different kinds of people described here?
 What are they doing?
 What does the conductor think of the crowded activity in his bus?

Proverb

He is a fool who gives all his corn to the wild birds and forgets to feed his own hens.

32

To the Anxious Mother

Into your arms I came 1
when you bore me, very anxious
you, who were so alarmed
at that monstrous moment
fearing that God might take me. 5
Everyone watched in silence
to see if the birth was going well
everyone washed their hands
to be able to receive the one who came from Heaven
and all the women were still and afraid. 10
But when I emerged
from the place where you had sheltered me so long
at once I drew my first breath
at once you cried out with joy
the first kiss was my grandmother's. 15
And she took me once to the place
where they kept me, hidden away
everyone was forbidden to enter my room
because everyone smelt bad
and I all fresh, freshed 20
breathed gently, wrapped in my napkins.
But grandmother, who seemed like a madwoman,
always looking and looking again
because the flies come at me
and the mosquitoes harried me 25
God who also watched over me
was my old granny's friend.

Valente Malangatana

- 5 Fearing that I might die.
25 *harried* : attacked.

What was the mother's feeling before the moment of birth?
What did this change to once the baby was born?
How did the other women react?
How did the grandmother show her care of the baby?
What do the references to God and Heaven tell us about this people and their attitude to birth?

33

Kariuki

In some parts of the world, names have very little importance or significance. In most African societies, however, the name given to a baby really does mean something. In this case, the name given to the baby arises from the belief that he is the reborn spirit of the old warrior, Kariuki.

The hour of midnight met with a gathering of mothers, 1
Their only talk – names upon names
‘It will be my nephew’ one said.
‘No, my sister’s cousin.’ ‘Kirahiu
Is the name or should it be Mwangi?’ 5

Then I heard the delicate squeal of a baby
(It is of an hour’s age)
Caused no less than a whole village to awake.
What causes them to awake?
And an old man comes struggling into the house. 10

“How are you, Kariuki?” This he whispers
To the deaf stranger of this world.
Whereupon the ‘Kariuki’ begins its endless journey.
It floats from mouth to mouth
‘It’s a boy!’ ‘Kariuki is born!’ 15
The old warrior is born again.

Joseph Gatuiria

What does the poet mean by the phrase: ‘The deaf stranger of this world’ (line 12)?

What makes the naming of the baby dramatic?

Grandpa

They say they are healthier than me 1
 Though they can't walk to the end of the mile;
 At their age I walked forty at night
 To wage a battle at dawn

They think they are healthier than me: 5
 If their socks get wet they catch a cold;
 When my sockless feet got wet, I never sneezed –
 But they still think they are healthier than me

On a soft mattress over a spring bed,
 They still have to take a sleeping-pill: 10
 But I, with reeds cutting into my ribs,
 My head resting on a piece of wood,
 I sleep like a babe and snore.

They blow their noses and pocket the stuff –
 That's hygienic so they tell me: 15
 I blow my nose into the fire,
 But they say that's barbaric.

If a dear one dies I weep without shame;
 If someone jokes I laugh with all my heart.
 They stifle a tear as if to cry was something wrong, 20
 But they also stifle to laugh,
 As if to laugh was something wrong, too.
 No wonder they need psychiatrists!

They think they have more power of will than me.
 Our women were scarcely covered in days of yore, 25
 But adultery was a thing unknown:
 Today they go wild when they see a slip on a hanger!

When I have more than one wife
They tell me that hell is my destination,
But when they have one and countless mistresses, 30
They pride themselves on cheating the world!

No, let them learn to be honest with themselves first
Before they persuade me to change my ways,
Says my grandfather, the proud old man.

Paul Chidyaustiku

- 20 *to stifle* : to keep under strict control.
25 *days of yore* : a poetic way of referring to the past.
27 *a slip* : a sleeveless garment worn under a dress.
30 *mistress* : a woman who a man keeps for a sexual relationship although he is not married to her.

Who is the 'they' that the old man refers to?
What are the comparisons which he makes between them and himself?
Do you think that his comments are fair?

On a Tired Housewife

(an epitaph)

An epitaph is something written on a grave or tomb as a memorial to the person buried underneath. Usually, it takes the form of some information about that person's life, or a summary of his or her virtues. This one, however, records the poor woman's complaint against her hard and busy life and her hope of heaven.

Here lies a poor woman who was always tired, 1
 She lived in a house where help wasn't hired;
 Her last words on earth were: 'Dear friends, I am going
 To where there's no cooking, or washing, or sewing,
 For everything there is exact to my wishes, 5
 For where they don't eat there's no washing of dishes.
 I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing,
 But having no voice I'll be quit of the singing.
 Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never,
 I am going to do nothing for ever and ever.' 10

Anon. ; British

- 7 *an anthem*: a song of praise.
ringing: sounding loud and clear.
 8 *quit of the singing*: free of the need to sing.

The Troubled Warrior

I'll put aside my hoe: 1
 Let them call me lazy.
 I'll lay aside my stick:
 Let my cattle rove alone.
 I'll bid farewell to my girl 5
 And my laughing sister
 Despite their sweet tears.
 I'll pat my younger brother.
 Then I'll go and kneel down
 Before the two heaps of stone 10
 Where my parents lie;
 I'll plead with them to call
 The blessings of their gods
 On me, a troubled youth,
 Before I go in pursuit. 15

Then I'll gird my loin-cloth.
 Sling my bow and sword
 Of my clan. Spear in hand
 I'll go to face the foe.
 The dewy grass shall be 20
 My couch; on the cold rock
 My head shall rest;
 The damp night air shall blanket me;
 And to the wild beast
 I'll be a guest. 25
 I'll drink from the wandering streams;
 Suck on wild fruits.
 Till I have faced my foe
 I'll be ashamed to face my home.
 Courage, hate, and my enemy's fate 30
 Drive me on. Mighty he stands
 But curse be on me if
 I show him my naked heels:
 No! never, never!
 Come death before I surrender 35
 But I'll slay him – this I know.

Then I'll dry my bleeding
Sword on my thirsty tongue;
And proclaim victory –
The will of my fathers. 40
Thus, all having been done,
And my poor heart settled,
I'll venture to go home.
I'll take my hoe and dig;
I'll pick up my stick and herd; 45
I'll court my girl and wed.
Having done my duty,
I'll sit by the fire
And grow old.

Alexander Muigai

What must this young man do before he settles down and grows old?
Why do you think he must do all these things, ?
What difficulties will arise as a result of his resolve?

The Fulani Story of the Creation

Different peoples throughout the world have different religious beliefs, with their own ideas of God and how the world was created. Although these stories and beliefs differ, they all express man's sense of wonder in the mystery of creation. This poem describes the creation as understood among the Fulani, a large, nomadic people of West Africa.

At the beginning there was a huge drop of milk.	1
Then Doondari came and he created the stone.	
Then the stone created the iron;	
And iron created fire;	
And fire created water;	5
And water created air.	
Then Doondari descended the second time.	
And he took the five elements	
And he shaped them into man.	
But the man was proud.	10
Then Doondari created blindness, and blindness	
defeated man	
But when blindness became too proud,	
Doondari created sleep, and sleep defeated blindness;	
But when sleep became too proud,	
Doondari created worry, and worry defeated sleep;	15
But when worry became too proud,	
Doondari created death, and death defeated worry	
But when death became too proud,	
Doondari descended for the third time,	
And he came as Gueno, the eternal one.	20
And Gueno defeated death.	

traditional Fulani

- What are the 'five elements'?
- What happened after man was created?
- What does the ending of the poem tell us?

Oloru – an Egungun

The writer of this poem is a young Nigerian woman. As the poem tells us, in the past a woman could never have looked upon Egungun (a Yoruba spirit; see poem 12, *A Genuine Gentleman*), but now the mystery and power of the traditional spirits and gods has gone.

Seven skulls he carries on his back 1
 Blood drained wild eyed, a baleful look.
 If any man tries
 To see him rise,
 He loses all, his heart, his head. 5

His regalia – so the story goes –
 Is steeped in the very devil's blood.
 He does not know
 His family,
 Must not be seen by a woman's eye. 10

Long long ago, so the story adds,
 He walked out once in full array,
 His daughter ran
 To say, 'Baba',
 And dropped down dead! 'Poor girl! How sad!' 15

The crowd thronged him as he moved along,
 And shouts of 'Olu' could be heard.
 In rushed the women,
 All doors were locked.
 'Oloru, Oloru is passing by.' 20

I peeped out – a great crowd, all men,
 I looked again – what did I see:
 A tall thin man,
 In plain pyjamas,
 Barefooted, bareheaded, marks on face. 25

And suddenly I wished I were back
In the good old days when Ololu was
A semi-god,
With seven skulls,
Not – no-one in particular.

30

Yetunde Esan

- 2 *baleful* : sinister.
6 *regalia* : the general word for all the emblems of authority which a person of power carries or wears.
14 *Baba* : father.

What picture are we given of the old Ololu? What examples are given of his power?

How does this contrast with the modern Ololu?

What is the writer's attitude to the decline of Ololu?

Why, do you think, she feels this way?

Superstition

I know that when a grumbling old woman Is the first thing I meet in the morning I must rush back to bed And cover my head.	1 5
That wandering sheep on a sultry afternoon Are really men come from their dark graves To walk in light In mortal sight.	 10
That when my left hand or eyelid twitches Or when an owl hoots from a nearby tree I should need pluck it means bad luck;	 15
That drink spilled goes to ancestral spirits, That witches dance in clumps of bananas; That crumbs must be left on pots and plates Until the morn For babes unborn.	 20
It is wrong to stand in doorways at dusk For the ghosts must pass – they have the right of way! That when hidden root trips me over Fault's not in my foot. It's an evil root.	 25
That if I sleep with my feet towards the door I'll not long be fit. I know it – Yes, I know it!	 25

Minji Karibo

6 *sultry* : oppressively hot.

9 *mortal sight*: so that they may be seen by living people.

17 *morn* : poetic way of saying 'morning'.

What are the beliefs mentioned in this poem?

What is the writer's attitude to these beliefs?

You will Walk in Peace

As in the last poem, here there are several examples of supernatural signs: these natural happenings mean something special and may be unnatural in fact. But the poem does not present these things as terrors – it seems to work as a kind of charm to protect and reassure you, and also tell you what these signs truly mean.

You will walk in peace 1
 Through the night,
 When you go,
 N'dila ho, do not listen
 To the voices of owls 5
 Because
 They tell of death.

You will walk in peace.
 Through the night,
 On your way, N'dila ho 10
 If you meet a mole
 If you smell a certain root
 Used when body are embalmed
 What they foretell is death.

You will walk in peace. 15
 Through the night,
 If you hear your name
 If you hear a low knock on your door
 Never never never answer
 For 20
 Death is watching you.

You will walk in peace,
 O N'dila ho, if you sneeze
 During the day;
 At night, 25
 Sneezing is an evil sign.

Marial Sinda

- 11 *a mole* : a small animal which lives underground.
13 *to embalm* : to treat a dead body in such a way that it will not decay.

What are the signs which warn you of death?

What do you say to protect yourself at such a time?

What is the effect of repetition in this poem?

41

Two Songs from Dahomey

(Great is our need to sing)

To the Sun-god

Softly, softly, Liza – O
Softly, O Sun-god,
Do not ravish the world.
Ram pawing the earth with hooves of flame,
Ram pounding the earth with horns of flame, 5
Do not ravish the earth,
Do not destroy us.

To Destiny

Bear down lightly, 1
O my load,
Bear down lightly,
As the boat touches water;
Bear down lightly, 5
O my load,
For my boat is near sinking;
Bear lightly,
And I will make offerings
To the Master of Destiny. 10

traditional Fon

Both of these poems are built up around a main image. In the first, this is the ram; in the second, the loaded boat. What do these images represent? What is the appeal made in each poem? What do these poems tell you about the conditions of life which these people face?

42

Song for the Dead

I see it, 1
There is no enjoying beyond Death,
And I say to all of you, say,
That which your senses taste of Life
Goes with you. 5

I say to you, say,
The wives you have,
The passion you know of them
Goes with you.

I say to you, say, 10
The drinks that you drink,
The pleasure of them
Goes with you.

I say to you, say,
The meats you eat, 15
The relish you have of them
Goes with you.

I say to you, say,
The pipes you smoke,
The quiet they bring 20
Goes with you.

Come, then,
Dance all the colours of life,
For a lover of pleasure
Now dead.

25

traditional Fon

What has just happened?

What does the poet invite us to do? Why?

What does the poem as a whole say about life and death?

What does the poet mean by the phrase 'the colours of Life' (line 23)?

What examples does he give? What others can you add?

Proverb

The lion that roars the loudest hasn't caught its prey yet.

Kob Antelope

A creature to pet and spoil 1
 like a child.
 Smooth skinned
 stepping cautiously
 in the lemon grass. 5
 Round and plump
 like a newly married wife.
 The neck
 heavy with brass rings.
 The eyes 10
 gentle like a bird's.
 The head
 beautiful like carved wood.
 When you suddenly escape
 you spread fine dust 15
 like a butterfly
 shaking its wings.
 Your neck seems long
 so very long
 to the greedy hunter. 20

traditional Yoruba

5 *lemon grass*: a grass which has a sweet fragrance.

A Newly-born Calf

1

A newly-born calf
 is like oven-baked bread
 steaming under a cellophane cover.
 The cow cuts
 the shiny coat 5
 as a child would
 lick a toffee
 with a tongue as pink as
 the sole of a foot.
 The calf sways on legs 10
 filled with jelly and custard
 instead of bone and marrow;
 and it totters
 to suck the teats
 of its mother's udder. 15

Oswald Mtshali

This poem describes the young calf in a very simple, homely images. What are the comparisons which the poet makes?

How do these images help you to imagine the calf more clearly?

What words or phrases suggest the frailty of the young calf?

W-o-o-o-o-o-ww!!

We are all used to folk tales which, though describing the adventures of animals, offer us instruction on our own behaviour. Here is a fairly modern poem, telling a similar kind of moral tale. The grizzly bear is a large American bear, particularly dangerous because of its strength and fierceness.

Away in a forest, all darksome deep and, 1
 The Wolves went a-hunting when men were asleep;
 And the cunning Old Wolves were so patient and wise,
 As they taught the young Cubs how to see with their eyes,
 How to smell with their noses and hear with their ears, 5
 And what a Wolf hunts for and what a Wolf fears.
 Of danger they warned: 'Cubs, you mustn't go there –
 It's the home of the Grizzly-izzly Bear.'

W-o-o-o-o-o-ww!!

The Cubs in the Pack very soon understood 10
 If they followed the Wolf law the hunting was good,
 And the Old Wolves who'd hunted long winters ago
 Knew better than they did the right way to go.
 But one silly Cub thought he always was right.
 And he settled to do his *own* hunting one night. 15
 He laughed at the warning – said *he* didn't care
 For the Grizzly-izzly Bear!

W-o-o-o-o-o-ww!!

So, when his elders were hot on the track,
 'I'm off now!' he barked to the Cubs of the Pack. 20
 'I'll have some adventures – don't mind what you say!
 A wave of his paw – and he bounded away.
 He bounded away till he came very soon
 Where the edge of the forest lay white in moon,
 To what he's been warned of – that terrible lair – 25
 The haunt of the Grizzly-izzly Bear!

W-o-o-o-o-o-ww!!

He came . . . and what happened? Alas! to the Pack
That poor silly Wolf-cub has never come back.
And once, in a neat little heap on the ground, 30
The end of a tail and a whisker were found,
Some fur, and a nose-tip – a bristle or two,
And the kindly Old Wolves shook their heads, for they knew
It was all of his nice little feast he could spare,
That Grizzly-izzly-izzly Bear!
W-o-o-o-o-o-ww!!

Nancy M. Hayes

- 19 *track* : marks or smell left by an animal.
hot on the *track* : close behind what they are hunting.
22 *bounded away* : moved off with a quick, jumping movement.
25 *lair* : den, or resting-place for a wild animal.
26 *haunt* : a place where someone or something often goes.

What kind of wisdom did the older wolves have, which they taught to the cubs?

Why did the young cub decide to ignore the warning of the older wolves?

What happened to him? How do we know?

What is the general moral lesson of this poem?

Do you think this is an important lesson? Why?

Proverb

He who hesitates, spears the tail.

Elephant Song

Pygmies, living in the thick forests of Central Africa, are famous hunters. This next poem is a hunting song, sang before going out after elephants.

On the weeping forest, under the evening wind, 1
 Black night has lain down joyfully,
 In the sky the stars have fled, trembling,
 Fireflies that shun vaguely and go out.
 Up there, the moon is dark, its white light has gone out. 5
 The spirits are wandering.
 Elephant hunter, take your bow!

Chorus

Elephant hunter, take your bow!

In the frightened forest the tree sleeps, leaves are dead,
 Monkeys have shut their eyes, hanging high in the branches, 10
 Antelopes slip along with silent steps,
 Crop the fresh grass, prick up their ears, intent,
 Raise their heads and listen, startled.
 The cicada falls silent, shutting in with a rasping song.
 Elephant hunter, take your bow! 15

Chorus

Elephant hunter, take your bow!

In the forest lashed by great rain,
 Father Elephant walks, heavily, *bau, bau*,
 At ease and fearless, sure of his strength,
 Father Elephant whom none can overcome, 20
 Breaking through the forest, he stops, starts off again.
 He eats, trumpets, knocks down trees, and seeks his mate.
 Father Elephant you are heard from far away.
 Elephant hunter, take your bow!

Chorus

Elephant hunter, take your bow!

In the forest through which no man except you goes,
 Hunter, lift up your heart, slip, run jump, walk!
 Meat is before you, the huge mass of meat,
 The meat that walks like a hill,
 The meat that makes the heart glad, 30
 The meat that will roast at your fire,
 The meat into which your teeth sink,
 The fine red meat and the blood that is drunk
 smoking.
 Elephant hunter, take your bow!

Chorus
 Elephant hunter, take your bow! 35

traditional Pygmy

- 12 *crop* : eat.
prick up their ears : raise ears to listen carefully.
 14 *cicada* : a winged insect which makes a loud, shrill sound.
rasping song : song produced by scraping one thing against another (a cicada has a special organ which it rubs to produce its song).
 33 *smoking* : steaming.

The poem progresses by a series of ideas in each stanza. In the first, we imagine the forest; in the second, the animals in the forest; in the third, the elephant moving around; and in the last, the hunter going after it thinking of the meat from his kill.

What time is this in the forest? What is the atmosphere in the forest?

What are the other animals in the forest doing?

How does the elephant move? What impression are we given of him?

What does the final stanza tell the hunter to do?

What will be his reward?

Chameleon

Not fast – now – 1
 Not so fast –
 You see –
 Calculate –
 And –
 And estimate – 5
 Then –
 Carefully now –
 Experiment –
 No! no! no! 10
 Hesitate –
 Now then –
 Grope – and reach –
 That's right.
 You gotta be sure 15
 The world's welcome's sure.

 Grandma used to tell me
 Go slow and don't show,
 Look how chameleon does it,
 Gradually, 20
 Everything in time,
 But then she forgot
 Chameleons change
 Tactics with circumstance.
 They abandon custom 25
 When the need changes.
 Ever watched its tongue attack?

Mudereri Kadhani

15–16 You have got to ('gotta') be sure that the world will definitely treat you well.

In the first stanza, the poet imagines the thoughts of the chameleon as it moves around. What are these thoughts? What kind of animal is the chameleon?

Read this stanza aloud. What is the effect of the way it is written?
What is the lesson which the grandmother feels that we can learn from the chameleon?
Does the poet agree? Why?

49

Lone Dog

I'm a lean dog, a keen dog, a wild dog, and lone; 1
I'm a rough dog, a tough dog, hunting on my own;
I'm a bad dog, a mad dog, teasing sheep
I love to sit and bay the moon, to keep fat souls from sleep.
I'll never be a lap dog, licking dirty feet, 5
A sleek dog, a meek dog, cringing for my meat,
Not for me the fireside, the well-filled plate,
But shut door, and sharp stone, and cuff, and kick and hate.
Not for me the other dogs, running by my side,
Some have run a short while, but none of them would abide. 10
O mine is still the lone trail, the hard trail, the best,
Wide wind, and wild stars, and the hunger of the quest.

I. R. Macleod

- 4 *bay the moon* : to give loud, deep barks to the moon.
6 *cringing* : moving in a humble, frightened way.
8 *cuff* : a blow given with an open hand.
10 *bide* : endure; put up with hardship for a long time.

What kind of dog is this?

What kind of life does he lead?

How is he different from a 'lap dog' (line 5)?

What does he think of his way of life?

What do *you* think of him?

Although the poem doesn't tell us, what do you imagine this dog looks like?

How will this be different from the appearance of a 'lap dog'?

Jamaican Bus Ride

The live fowl squatting on the grapefruit and bananas
 in the basket of the copper-coloured lady
 is gloomy but resigned. 1

The four very large baskets on the floor
 are in everybody's way, 5
 as the conductor points out
 loudly, often, but in vain.

Two quadroon dandies are disputing
 who is standing on whose feet.

When we stop, 10
 a boy vanishes through the door marked ENTRANCE;
 but those entering through the door marked EXIT
 are greatly hindered by the fact that when we started
 there were twenty standing
 and another ten have somehow inserted themselves 15
 into invisible crannies
 between dark sweating body and body.

With an odour of petrol
 both excessive and alarming
 we hurtle hell-for-leather 20
 between crimson bougainvillaea blossom
 and scarlet poinsettia
 and miraculously do not run over
 three goats, seven hens and a donkey
 as we pray 25
 that the driver has not fortified himself
 at Daisy's Drinking Saloon
 with more than four rums:
 or by the gods of Jamaica
 this day is our last. 30

A. S. J. Tessimond

- 8 *quadroon* : someone of one-quarter African descent.
dandies : people who care excessively about the way they dress.
 15 *inserted* : fitted.
 16 *crannies* : small openings (called 'invisible' because, with the crowds of people already on the bus, no one thought that any such spaces were available).
 20 *hell-for-leather* : very quickly indeed.
 26 *fortified* : strengthened.

Why is the fowl mentioned in line 1 described as 'gloomy but resigned'?
 What else, apart from passengers, does the bus carry?
 What instances does the poem give of the chaos inside the bus?
 What happens when the bus stops?
 How is the bus driven?

51

An Old Jamaican Woman Thinks about the Hereafter

What would I do forever in a big place, who
 have lived all my life in a small island? 1
 The same parish holds the cottage I was born in, all
 my family, and the cool churchyard.

I have looked 5
 up at the stars from my front verandah and have been afraid
 of their pathless distances. I have never flown
 in the loud aircraft nor have I seen palaces,
 so I would prefer not to be taken up high nor
 rewarded with a large mansion. 10

I would like
 to remain half-drowsing through an evening light
 watching bamboo trees sway and ruffle for a valley-wind,
 to remember old times but not to live them again;
 occasionally to have a good meal with no milk 15
 nor honey for I don't like them, and now and then to walk
 by the grey sea-beach with two old dogs and watch
 men bring up their boats from the water.

For all this,
for my hope of heaven, I am willing to forgive my debtors 20
and to love my neighbour . . .
although the wretch throws stones
at my white rooster and makes too much noise in her damn
backyard.

A. L. Hendriks

The Hereafter : the life to come (in this case, life after death).

12 *half-drowsing* : feeling a little sleepy.

13 *sway and ruffle* : to move gently from side to side and to disturb its leaves.

This old woman quietly thinks about the kind of heaven she hopes for. In doing so, she tells us a lot about her life.

Why doesn't she want to be in a big palace or up high when she is in heaven?

What does she want?

What kind of life has she lived?

How does she feel about that life?

52

Home

Home is the place where the diseased world dies at the door, 1
where the floor and carpet are worn by familiar feet,
where you can close your eyes and nobody says you are blind.

Home is where you don't have to be polite and sing
cane-sweet song to coat bitterness, 5
where familiarity accepts you in its security,
where you know that love still breathes somewhere,
where your wife and children keep the other half of you.

Where the rain broadcasts the glass face of the fields
and moves the tidemark of the canals, 10
when you do not know where to go,
home is where they never say 'no'.

The small cottage that sits cosily under the palms,
the atap, brown with time and age hangs to the field,
the complaining hinges and wet stairs,
home is you
and where you hope to die.

15

Mohammad Haji Salleh

- 4 *sing cane-sweet song to coat bitterness* : pretend to feel happy when you in fact do not, like a sour substance which is disguised by being covered ('coated') with something sweet.
- 8 Where the rain shows ('broadcasts') the otherwise smooth surface ('glass face') "Of the rice-fields and also makes the level of water in the canals rise.
- 12 *atap* : the Malay word for palm leaves which are used for thatch.

The house described in this poem is not very luxurious.
In fact, it is a simple one. What, then, makes it 'home'?

Proverb

The earthworm is slow, but it gets to the well.

Wild Oats

The mud on my feet, mother, 1
 Is from the long journey
 I made, deluded that at the end
 I should find wisdom and peace.
 I trudged the hot red roads 5
 And the hills that strive to touch the stars,
 And came upon a clear river
 In the folds of a valley.

I watched how it overcame the hills
 By curling around their feet, 10
 And stretching out on its way
 To the sea. It was then
 I heard the anguished cry,
 Mother, to come back to your breast.

Kwesi Brew

The title of this poem refers to the expression 'to sow wild oats', which means to live a life of folly (usually one of pleasure) before settling down properly. While the speaker in the poem did not leave home for reasons of seeking pleasure, his journey is seen as an act of youth, mistakenly trying to find his own way in life, away from his family and home.

- 1 What did the speaker want to find by his journey?
- 2 What words and phrases in the poem indicate that the journey was a difficult one?
- 3 What did he see when he reached the valley? What was the significance of what he saw?
- 4 Where is he to find 'wisdom and peace'?
- 5 What is the effect of the phrase, 'Come back to your breast' (line 14)?

Farmer's Boy

He waits all day beside his little flock 1
 And asks the passing stranger what's o'clock,
 But those who often pass his daily tasks
 Look at their watch and tell before he asks.
 He mutters stories to himself and lies 5
 Where the thick hedge the warmest house supplies,
 And when he hears the hunters far and wide
 He climbs the highest tree to see them ride –
 He climbs till all the fields are bleak and bare
 And makes the old crow's nest an easy chair. 10
 And soon his sheep are got in other grounds –
 He hastens down and fears his master come.
 He stops the gap and keeps them all in bounds
 And tends them closely till it's time for home.

John Clare

- 2 *what's o'clock* : what the time is.
- 6 Where the thick hedge gives ('supplies') the best shelter and warmth ('the warmest house').
- 7 *hunters* : people who ride out on horses with dogs, to hunt out wild animals such as foxes.
- 9 He climbs until he is so high up in the tree that all the fields stretch out around him and look as if they are empty.
- 14 *stops the gap* : closes the gap which the sheep have got through.

How does this boy spend his day?

What distracts him?

Why do the sheep wander where they shouldn't?

Why does this worry him? What does he do?

The Herdsboy's Misery

Happy are the blacksmith's children, 1
 Happy are my brothers
 Who spend their time in play
 Splashing in cool Hinatye river.

Their mothers embrace them. 5
 They play games in the village courtyard.
 In a field, after dark, they tell stories
 Of hunting, dancing, and cattle raids.

I – miserable herdsboy – am out of place.
 I spend my days in burning heat. 10
 I am enslaved,
 Till the guinea fowl cackles at dusk,
 To greedy cattle.

My thoughts are always of pasture,
 Rich pasture 15
 That makes fat cattle,
 Fat cattle for bride wealth.

I am always in fear,
 Fear of heat,
 Fear of cold and rain storms, 20
 Fear of thorny grass,
 Fear, when a sick cow or calf is lost.
 Of being starved,
 Fear, when the cattle invades a man's farm,
 Of being thrashed. 25

I envy my friends
 Who go to learn
 The white man's words
 Which like a hen's claw marks
 They scratch on the ground. 30

My friends boast that they can write,
 That they speak the white man's language.
 They say that herding cattle
 Is simpleton's work,
 A mark of primitivity, 35
 For modern man lives in a brick house.
 I am doomed to follow grass,
 To wander after cattle.
 Only anthrax, wiping out the herd,
 Can save me. 40

R. Oler-Opyaha

- 12 *cackles* : makes harsh, broken sounds, like a hen.
 34 *simpleton's work* : work for a foolish person, who knows nothing.
 37 *doomed* : fated.
 39 *anthrax* : an infectious disease of cattle, usually fatal.

This young boy feels envious of others of his age. Why?
 In what ways could he be thought of as 'enslaved' (line II)?
 What are the problems which he faces looking after his herd?
 Part of his unhappiness is caused by the opinion of others towards him and
 the work that he does. What is that opinion? Is it fair?

Banks of Marble

This poem was written during the Depression in America, earlier this century, when millions of people suffered unemployment and hardship, despite the richness of the country.

I've travelled round this country 1
 From shore to shining shore;
 It really made me wonder,
 The things I heard and saw,

I saw the weary farmer 5
 Ploughing his sod and loam;
 I heard the auction hammer
 Just a-knocking down his home.

But the Banks arc made of Marble,
 With a guard at every door; 10
 And the vaults are stuffed with silver
 That the farmer sweated for.

I've seen the seaman standing
 Idly by the shore;
 I've heard the bosses saying, 15
 'Got no work for you no more.'
 But the Banks arc made of Marble,
 With a guard at every door;
 And the vaults are stuffed with silver
 That the seaman sweated for. 20

I've seen the weary miner
 Scrubbing coaldust from his back;
 I've heard his children crying,
 'We've got no coal to heat the shack.'

But the Banks are made of Marble, 25
With a guard at every door;
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the miner sweated for.

I've seen my brothers working
Throughout this mighty land; 30
I've prayed we'd get together
And together make a stand.

Then we might own those Banks of Marble,
With a guard at every door;
And we would share those vaults of silver 35
That we have sweated for.

Anon.; American

8 a-knocking down his home : selling his home, by auction.

What are the surprising things which the poet saw as he travelled around?

Why are they surprising?

What does he think should be done about this situation?

So let's conclude, let's be content 25
With that which the Lord does send us;
Let us our evil lives repent
Then in our woes God will defend us;
And let rich men be merciful
Unto the poor stranger or neighbour, 30
For all do know, unto their woe --
All's dear but poor man's labour.

Anon.; British

- 3 The rich can no longer support ("bear") the poor.
6 *favour* : reward.
14 *favour* : kindness.
16 *Staffordshire* : a county in England.
20 *pepper* : at the time of this poem, this was a luxury food.
23 *a pound* : twenty shillings.
 storm : show their anger.

What is the condition of the poor in this poem?

What is the complaint made against the rich throughout the poem?

In what way is the farmer of Staffordshire a 'knave'?

What does the poem say should be done about this situation?

The Old Wood-seller

Just an old man from the mountains I
 his whiskers bedraggled snow
 Shouldering firewood
 he woke early, set out at dawn
 The city gate's in sight 5
 but he has a long way to journey
 The fuel's heavy
 his body gaunt, a tired tortoise
 Withered skin
 but he has to squeeze out the drops of sweat 10
 Laboured tread
 from a distance you hear the effort of his breath
 Other travellers, young and sturdy
 keep on passing him
 His body's tired 15
 his mind won't give him time to rest
 Young blood in the rich suburbs,
 more arrogant than usual
 Waves an imperious sleeve from his porch
 gives an impatient shout 20
 The old man lowers his eyes, mentions a sum
 steps back to listen
 He's beaten down
 to half his asking price
 But he hands the firewood over 25
 daren't delay a sale
 With a sick wife waiting at his gate
 for a bite of breakfast.

Chinese; translated by John Scott

2 *bedraggled* : made wet with snow.

8 *gaunt* : unhealthily thin.

17 *young blood* : a young man of fashion.

19 *imperious* : arrogant and commanding.

23 *beaten down* : forced to accept a lower sum of money.

- Why is this old man compared to a 'tired tortoise' (line 8)?
 How does the poem convey the effort and strain of his journey with his load of firewood?
 What details of his life does the poem bring out?
 What are your feelings towards this man?
 What do you think of the young man who buys his wood?

59

African Beggar

Sprawled in the dust outside the Syrian store, 1
 a target for small children, dogs and flies,
 a heap of verminous rags and matted hair,
 he watches us with cunning, reptile eyes,
 his noseless, smallpoxed face creased in a sneer. 5

Sometimes he shows his yellow stumps of teeth
 and whines for alms, perceiving that we bear
 the curse of pity; a grotesque mask of death,
 with hands like claws about his begging bowl.

But often he is lying all alone 10
 within the shadow of a crumbling wall,
 lost in the trackless jungle of his pain,
 clutching the pitiless red earth in vain
 and whimpering like a stricken animal.

Raymond Tong

- 3 *verminous rags* : ragged clothes full of vermin, such as fleas and lice.
 5 *smallpoxed face* : face marked by smallpox (a serious disease which scars the face).
creased in a sneer : lined in such a way that a twisted smile is produced.
 8 *the curse of pity* : the feeling of pity is something we cannot avoid; it is like a curse which has been put on us – inescapable.
grotesque mask of death : his face is wild and strange, and looks like the figure of death.
 14 *whimpering* : giving weak, pained cries.
stricken : wounded.

The details of this description of the beggar are very vivid indeed and bring home to us the condition of this man. What is his condition?

What impression are we given of him?

What do you think is the poet's attitude towards the beggar?

Disgust? Sympathy? What leads you to your conclusion?

Is there any point when the poet seems to recognize the humanity of the beggar and helps us realize the distress of his situation?

How do others behave towards the beggar? Why do they act this way?

How appropriate are the following words and phrases which the poet uses when describing the beggar?

reptile eyes (line 4)

a grotesque mask of death (line 8)

clutching (line 13)

whimpering (line 14)

What does the phrase 'the trackless jungle of his pain (line 12) tell us about the beggar and our relationship to his suffering?

60

The Blind Man

Was that a sound piercing his darkness? 1
The blind man shuddered:
'Who's there?'
He gasped; jerked forward, strained ears, ruffled poise
To catch a repetition of the noise — 5
Which never came again.
He rectified, again he bent:
The broken silence was doubly silent
Now. 'Who's there?' he called
Again, nor waited for a reply: 10
His hands stretched out, fingers felt about
To touch something, anything, to push fear out.

None answered him.
But none harmed him;
So, his solitary peace resettled o'er him. 15

Yet apprehensions daily still assail,
Nor hand, mouth, nose and ear
Replace one eye.
But worse,
He hears the voice, receives the gifts 20
Of men – but never feels their touch.

Nor seems it odd:
For alms aren't handed to him, but dropped
(Like manna from the skies). No wonder then,
He gets his needs from men, 25
But gives his thanks to God.

Pius Oleghe

- 4 *ruffled poise* : disturbed the way that he stood.
7 *rectified* : corrected himself (i.e. went back to the way he was standing before).
15 *o'er* : over.
16 But fears ('apprehensions') still attack him ('assail') every day.
24 *manna* : food provided by God.

- What effect does a strange noise have on this blind man?
Why is his peace solitary?
Why are the alms that he receives compared to manna?
What contact does he have with other men?
How appropriate is the phrase; 'piercing his darkness' (line 1)?
In what way is the 'broken silence doubly silent' (line 8)?

Fog : a thick mist which it is difficult to see through.

2 keen : sight.

What was the effect of this fog on the poet?

When did the poet realize that the man who was leading him was blind?

Why does the poet say that he followed the man 'like a child'?

Two riddles

1 Two tiny black birds jump over two hundred trees.

2 It bears 200 children in a day and all grow white hair on the same day.

62

Frogs

The storm broke, and it rained, 1
And water rose in the pool,
And frogs hopped into the gutter,

With their skins of yellow and green,
And just their eyes shining above the surface 5
Of the warm solution of slime.

At night, when fireflies trace
Light-lines between the trees and flowers
Exhaling perfume,

The frogs speak to each other 10
In rhythm. The sound is monstrous,
But their voices are filled with satisfaction.

In the city I pine for the country;
In the country I long for conversation –
Our happy croaking.

15

Louis Simpson

This poem describes very well that moment during and after rainstorms, when frogs suddenly appear as if from nowhere and begin their chorus of croaking. What are the details in the poem which enable us to imagine this time? What atmosphere does the description of the scene at night create? What is the connection between the last verse and the rest of the poem? What do the frogs make the poet think of?

Bats

A bat is born 1
 Naked and blind and pale.
 His mother makes a pocket of her tail
 And catches him. He clings to her long fur
 By his thumbs and toes and teeth. 5
 And then the mother dances through the night
 Doubling and looping, soaring, somersaulting –
 Her baby clings on underneath.
 All night, in happiness, she hunts and flies.
 Her high sharp cries 10
 Like shining needlepoints of sound
 Go out into the night and, echoing back,
 Tell her what they have touched.
 She hears how far it is, how big it is,
 Which way it's going: 15
 She lives by hearing.
 The mother eats the moths and gnats she catches
 In full flight; in full flight
 The mother drinks the water of the pond
 She skims across. Her baby hangs on tight. 20
 Her baby drinks the milk she makes him
 In moonlight or starlight, in mid-air.
 Their single shadow, printed on the moon
 Or fluttering across the stars,
 Whirls on all night; at daybreak 25
 The tired mother flaps home to her rafter.
 The others are all there.
 They hang themselves up by their toes.
 They wrap themselves in their brown wings.
 Bunched upside-down, they sleep in air. 30
 Their sharp ears, their sharp teeth, their quick, sharp faces
 Are dull and slow and mild.
 All the bright day, as the mother sleeps,
 She folds her wings about her sleeping child.

Randall Jarrell

- 2-3 Constantly complaining, like a spirit which has lost its power and has been driven away by a magician.
 4 *held sway over* : had power over.
 8 *revelry* : merrymaking.
 11 *flourishing of trumpets* : blowing of trumpets, as in a fanfare.

As a description of a palm tree, once crowded with noisy weaver birds but now bare and desolate, this poem is written in an unusual way. How do the details fit such a description?

What do the words and phrases that the poet uses make you think of?

What is the 'ingratitude' (line 22) which the tree feels has been shown against it?

65

Nature

We have neither Summer nor Winter
 Neither Autumn nor Spring. 1

We have instead the days
 When gold sun shines on the lush green canefields –
 Magnificently. 5

The days when the rain beats like bullets on the roofs
 And there is no sound but the swish of water in the gullies
 And trees struggling in the high Jamaican winds.

Also there are the days when the leaves fade from
 guango trees
 And the reaped canefields lie bare and fallow in the sun. 10

But best of all there are the days when the mango and
 the logwood blossom.
 When all the bushes are full of the sound of bees and
 the scent of honey.
 When the tall grass sways and shivers to the slightest
 breath of air.
 When the buttercups have paved the earth with yellow stars
 And beauty comes suddenly and the rains have gone. 15

H. D. Carberry

- 4 canefields : fields of sugar-cane.
 8 *high* : strong.
 15 *buttercups* : small yellow flowers which grow wild in great numbers.

What are the seasons which occur in Jamaica?

What happens during these seasons?

66

The Rain-man's Praise-song of Himself

No house is ever too thick-built 1
 To keep me, the rain, from getting in.
 I am well-known to huts and roofs,
 A grandson of Never-Been-There.
 I am mother to the finest grasses, 5
 Father of green fields everywhere.
 My arrows do not miss their aim,
 They strike the owner of huts.
 I am a terror to clay walls and the architecture of
 termites,
 Fear-inspiring above and below. 10
 When I pour in the morning, people say:
 'He has cut off our lips and stopped our mouths,
 He is giving us juicy fruits.
 He has rained and brought mushrooms,
 White as ivory.' 15

traditional Aadonga

- 4 *Never-Been-There*: the mischievous kind of person who refuses to admit to causing any damage by claiming that he was not there at the time.

The rain-man chooses to praise himself by singing of the effects of rain, both good and bad. What are the examples of the effect of rain mentioned in the poem?

The Dry Season

The year is withering; the wind 1
 Blows down the leaves;
 Men stand under eaves
 And overhear the secrets
 Of the cold, dry wind, 5
 Of the half-bare trees.

The grasses are tall and tinted,
 Straw-gold hues of dryness,
 And the contradicting awryness,
 Of the dusty roads a-scatter 10
 With pools of colourful leaves,
 With ghosts of the dreaming year.

And soon, soon the fires,
 The fires will begin to burn,
 The hawk will flutter and turn 15
 On its wing and swoop for the mouse,
 The dog will run for the hare,
 The hare for its little life.

Kwesi Brew

- 1 *withering* : drying up; and also, like a living thing which withers, dying, coming to an end.
 3 *eaves* : the overhanging edges of roofs.
 4 *the secrets* : as the wind blows, it seems to be saying something.
 9-11 The roads run crookedly across the land in a disorderly way ('contradicting awryness') and have scattered collections of dried leaves on them.

What are the specific descriptive details in the poem by which we can imagine the *sights* and *sounds* of this time of year?

How does the poem create an impression of the harsh desolation of this season?

Within the general picture of a dying landscape, the poet gives us glimpses of the activity of wildlife. What are these living things doing?

What are the words and images in the poem which suggest death?

An African Thunderstorm

From the west 1
 Clouds come hurrying with the wind
 Turning sharply
 Here and there
 Like a plague of locusts 5
 Whirling,
 Tossing up things on its tail
 Like a madman chasing nothing.

Pregnant clouds
 Ride stately on its back 10
 Gathering to perch on hills
 Like dark sinister wings:
 The wind whistles by
 And trees bend to let it pass.

In the village 15
 Screams of delighted children
 Toss and turn
 In the din of the whirling wind,
 Women –
 Babies clinging to their backs – 20
 Dart about
 In and out
 Madly;
 The wind whistles by
 Whilst trees bend to let it pass. 25

Clothes wave like tattered flags
 Flying off
 To expose dangling breasts
 As jagged blinding flashes
 Rumble, tremble and crack 30
 Amidst the smell of fired smoke
 And the pelting march of the storm.

David Rubadiri

- 3-8 These lines describe the wind.
10 *stately* : in a dignified way.
its : the wind.
12 *sinister* : suggesting something evil.
26 *tattered* : ragged; badly torn.
30 The sound of thunder.
31 *fired smoke* : the smoking fires around the village are here compared to the smoke produced by soldiers' firearms.
32 *pelting* : beating heavily.

To describe the storm, the poet has chosen his words with such care that he gives us sharp, particular details and a general impression of its violence and the frantic activity in the village. Look carefully at the details.

What words and images depict the *sights*, *sounds* and *movements* of this situation?

The poem has many very successful images; what are the comparisons which the poet makes and how do they work? In particular, what images compare the storm with living creatures?

In the final verse, what images and phrases suggest an attacking army?

Read 'the poem aloud – can you hear how, the 'Short lines give the poem a quick, almost wild rhythm, like the storm itself?

Young Shepherd Bathing his Feet

Only the short, broad, splayed feet 1
 Moved . . .

Feet that had trodden over
 Soft soil.
 Sand, 5
 Ploughed veld,
 Mountain rocks
 And along narrow tracks,
 On Winter clay and
 Dust of 10
 Summer roads . . .

The short, broad, splayed feet
 Moved
 In and out . . .

The stumpy toes stretched wide 15
 Apart
 And closed together
 Then opened wide . . .

In ecstasy.

Peter Clarke

- 1 *splayed* : flat and turned outwards.
 6 *veld* : South African word for grasslands.

What kind of feet are these?
 How does the shepherd feel as he bathes his feet? Why?
 What is the effect of the final line ?

Sorghum

- Sorghum, sorghum, O sorghum, 1
 Sorghum and Kiga are one;
 When you have a guest
 You give him sorghum beer.
- Through the upturned soil 5
 Two shoots first show themselves.
 During the rains
 The tiny plant begins to swell and tremble,
 More shoots emerge
 To peer at sun and moon. 10
- The farmer keenly watches
 This life plant, mother of people,
 From whose juice grows the black blood
 That nourishes young and old.
- As the rains endure, and weeds multiply, 15
 He must clean his plot,
 Toiling through torrents,
 Resting only in the torrid night
 Till the plant begins to flower
 And a crown of berries, green-shining to copper, 20
 Is its spear-head
 Over grass and pollen grain.
 The season's march brings birds,
 Many birds. They soar, dive, perch and peck.
 They plunder the lovely sorghum fruit. 25
 They sing in discords and in chorus.
 O 'Happy season of harvest time':
 Cuckoos, weavers, crows and partridges –
 They fly, they mate, they feed
 O merry time, O sorghum! 30

Then with his curved knife
 Singing and whistling among the stalks
 The farmer fells the sorghum
 Jolly fat women chop off the berry
 Youths carry it home. 35
 When the brew is ready
 Men suck through tubes the juice
 They sing, shout, groan and howl,
 They stoop, dance, and lie down,
 They fall under the heavy potent weight. 40
 Who cares? 'Tis harvest time',
 Sing women in the inner room
 Dancing in praise.

traditional BaKiga

- 1 *sorghum* : a kind of millet, used by the BaKiga people to make local beer.
 17 *torrents* : violent streams of water.
 18 *torrid* : very hot.
 25 *plunder* : rob.
 40 *potent* : powerful.

Why is sorghum being praised here?

This poem gives us a marvellous description of the growth of the crops and the harvest time. What details of the farming year are we given? What feelings does harvest-time rouse? Why?

Proverb

He who brews alone, brews bad beer.

So then to his palace returned he,
And he sat down to supper merrily,
And he slept that night like an innocent man.
But Bishop Hatto never slept again.

In the morning as he enter'd the hall, 30
Where his pictures hung against the wall,
A sweat like death all over him came;
For the rats had eaten it out of the frame.

As he look'd there came a man from his farm,
He had a countenance white with alarm; 35
'My lord, I open'd your granaries this morn,
And the rats had eaten all your corn.'

Another came running presently,
And he was pale as pale could be;
'Fly! my Lord Bishop, fly,' quoth he, 40
'Ten thousand rats are coming this way --
The Lord forgive you for yesterday!'

Bishop Hatto fearfully hasten'd away,
And he crossed the Rhine without delay,
And reach'd his tower, and barr'd with care 45
All the windows, doors, and loopholes there.

He laid him down and closed his eyes,
But soon a scream made him arise;
He started, and saw two eyes of flame
On his pillow from whence the screaming came. 50

He listen'd and look'd; it was only the cat;
But the Bishop grew more fearful for that,
For she sat screaming, mad with fear,
At the army of rats that was drawing near.

For they have swum over the river so deep, 55
And they have climb'd the shores so steep,
And up the tower their way is bent,
To do the work for which they were sent.

They are not to be told by the dozen or score;
By thousands they come, and by myriads and more; 60
Such numbers had never been heard of before,
Such a judgement had never been witness'd of yore.

Down on his knees the Bishop fell,
And faster and faster his beads did he tell,
As louder and louder drawing near 65
The gnawing of their teeth he could hear.

And in at the windows, and in at the door,
And through the walls helter-skelter they pour,
And down from the ceiling, and up through the floor,
From the right and the left, from behind and before, 70
From within and without, from above and below,
And all at once to the Bishop they go.

They have whetted their teeth against the stones,
And now they pick the Bishop's bones;
They gnaw'd the flesh from every limb, 75
For they were sent to do judgement on him!

Robert Southey

3 *'Twas* : it was.

7 *last year's store* : store of food from the previous year.

9 *furnished* : supplied.

12 *repair* : report.

14 They were happy to hear such news.

22 *I' faith, 'tis* : indeed, it is.

quoth : old-fashioned way of saying 'said'.

35 *countenance* : look on his face

40 *fly* : run away.

57 *bent* : determined.

60 *myriads* : great numbers.

62 *yore* : old-fashioned way of saying 'long ago'.

64 *his beads did he tell* : he counted his prayer beads (i.e. prayed).

73 *whetted*: sharpened.

What was the plight of the people?

How should the Bishop have helped them? What did he in fact do?

What did he call them? Why?

What are the stages of his punishment?

Why was his punishment particularly appropriate?

'A girl must pay to have her way
And follow a man like me.'
Then he turned and smiled at his own dear love,
And she wished that she were free. 60

She looked with fear at her husband dear,
But she could not run for fright,
So she followed the man with the crippled stumps
As he stumbled through the night.

They came upon an armless man 65
Who sat beside the way,
And he stopped before that armless man -
'There's a debt that I must pay.'

He tore the arms from off his trunk
To give to the armless man: 70
'Thanks for the loan of these your limbs,'
The stranger then began -

'A girl who loves a legless man
Won't miss a pair of arms.'
And he turned and smiled at his own dear love, 75
Displaying all his charms.

She looked with fear at her husband dear,
But she could not run for fright:
For better to go with one you know
Than back into that night, 80

So he gave back the body of man
That never had been his own:
He gave the heart out of his breast,
He gave the tall backbone.

'A girl who follows a handsome face
Is as wise as any child.'
So the head rolled on before the girl,
And caught her eyes and smiled.

'Soon we'll be home my dearest love,
And you shall share my bed.' 90
But proud Hasana moaned and wept
And wished that she were dead.

They came to a man who had no face,
Sat there beside the way:
And he stopped before faceless man, 95
And he gave his flesh away.

So now she knew her lover's name,
No need had she to ask!
On his narrow bed in the bitter earth
She performed her wifely task. 100

She lay in fear by that husband dear,
For the bone has a cold embrace,
When life is done and beauty's gone
In a cold and lonely place.

I swear to you my tale is true, 5
And was since time began;
If you can't tell what's in my mind.
Perhaps your mothers can.

For love is like a pleasant flower
To pluck before it's grown, 10
But there are thorns in than bonny bush
Will prick you to the bone.

Paul Edwards

What kind of person was Hasana? How did she show this?
What attracted her to the stranger?
Why was she foolish to follow him?
What happened on the journey to his home?
Who or what had Hasana in fact fallen in love with?
What was her final fate?
What do you think of Hasana? Do you think her fate was a just one?
There are several moral lessons to be drawn from this tale. What do you think is the main one?

Proverb

A disobedient fowl obeys in a pot of soup.

The questions asked at the end of most of the poems in this anthology are intended to help stimulate the students' thinking about what they read and suggest areas for possible discussion. These additional notes are especially for the teacher to suggest classroom activities which may arise from individual poems. They are suggestive and brief, so that the teacher may take up any that he feels needed and develop them in his own way. The teaching of poetry is often experimental, and the teacher will certainly want to try out his own ideas, use a variety of approaches, and add to them in those ways. The ways of reading the poems outlined in these notes are by no means the only ways open to the teacher.

The teacher-designed arrangement given for these readings are only examples of the organization which can be planned. It is important for the teacher to have a fairly clear idea of the kind of reading he wants from the pupils. Individual reading requires careful planning (though pupils will often provide their own ideas if the teacher encourages them to think about rhythmic effect and the mood of any poem). Poems will sometimes have divisions can be marked before any reading (as is done in the some examples in these notes), but it is important to bear in mind that an excessive use of any reading can be a total catastrophe.

1. Riddles and Proverbs

Discussion and Writing

Further riddles and proverbs should take up the first lesson. They are suitable for 5-10 minute spots in occasional lessons, over a period of time the pupils will have collected, listed and written a considerable number and variety of examples. A class could keep a 'Riddles and Proverbs' book in which all the examples collected and made up by the individual members. Organizers for group discussion are available usually when dealing with riddles/proverbs. With a list, the discussion will mainly be during the process of solving the puzzle; with proverbs, the challenge is to understand the particular wisdom which is being expressed (this refers to

Additional teaching notes

The questions asked at the end of most of the poems in the anthology are intended to help stimulate the students' thinking about what they read and suggest areas for possible discussion. These additional notes are specifically for the teacher, to suggest classroom activities which may arise from individual poems. They are selective and brief, so that the teacher may take up any that he feels useful and develop them in his own way. The teaching of poetry is often experimental, and the teacher will certainly want to try out his own ideas, use a variety of approaches, and add to ideas in these notes. The ways of treating the poems outlined in these notes are by no means the only ways open to the teacher.

The more detailed arrangements given for choral reading are only examples of the 'orchestration' which can be planned. It is important for the teacher to have a fairly clear idea of the kind of reading he wants from the pupils, so choral reading requires careful planning (though pupils will often provide their own ideas, if the teacher encourages them to think about rhythmic effects and the mood of any poem). Poems with particularly strong rhythms can be marked before any reading (as is done with some examples in these notes), but it is important to bear in mind that an excessive beat to any reading can sound grotesque.

I *Riddles and Proverbs*

Discussion and writing

Neither riddles nor proverbs should take up much time in anyone lesson. They are suitable for 5-10 minute spots in occasional lessons: over a period of time the pupils will have collected, talked about and written a considerable number and variety of examples. A class could keep a 'Riddles and Proverbs' book, in which are written all the examples collected and made up by the individual members. Opportunities for group-discussion arise quite naturally when dealing with riddles/proverbs. With riddles, the discussion will mainly be during the process of solving the puzzle; with proverbs, the challenge is to understand the particular wisdom which is being expressed (this helps to

enhance the pupils' awareness of the values of their society).

Pupils can add to the store of riddles by providing examples that they already know and then trying to write their own. The aim is for them to devise a clever and apt metaphor for the object being described. The difficulty is in achieving a proper balance between giving enough clues in that metaphor for others to be able to work out the answer, and at the same time not making the riddle too obvious and easy. Original writing can be initially controlled by the teacher giving the whole class a 'solution' for which the pupils must make up riddles. The results are surprisingly varied. The next step, of course, is for the pupils to devise their own riddles for the teacher and class to talk about and solve.

The answers to the riddles given are:

- 1 a cooking pot on a fire
- 2 fire
- 3 the eye
- 4 a train
- 5 a leaf falling from a tree
- 6 a cooking pot with food inside
- 7 the tongue and teeth
- 8 a river.

2 *There's a Hole in my Bucket*

Choral Reading

Properly, this is a song, but if nobody knows the music, the words can still be treated as choral reading.

The rhythmic pattern is a regular four beats to a line:

There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,
There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole.

Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry;
Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, fix it.

Drama

The choral reading can be used as initial activity on the poem, leading to dramatization. Even as simple a poem as this can lead to interesting characterization. What kind of man is Henry? How does Liza react to his questions? Patiently? With irritation? Does her reaction change as he asks more and more questions? The pupils should be encouraged to bring some

life into the acting, by aiming to present definite characters (e.g. Henry as a clumsy, dull-witted man; Liza as a bossy, authoritative woman who gets increasingly impatient with his stupidity.) Dramatization is much easier for the pupils if they are not dependent on reading from books. This poem is simple enough for most pupils to pick up quite quickly. The addition of props and a specific situation (e.g. Liza sitting outside the hut, cooking) helps the pupils to develop the drama.

3 *Bread fruit and*

4 *There was an Old Woman*

Both these poems are linked by the similar pattern which is used, a repetitious pattern which is quite common in children's verse. It makes the poetry easy to join in with and ultimately to learn. They are both poems which are good for choral reading. The easiest way is straight reading by everyone together. This is particularly fun with these poems, as the pupils usually enjoy a manic acceleration in reading speed as they go through them!

There are, however, different ways in which the reading may be done once the pupils have got used to the poems. For example, individuals could read the new lines to each verse, with the rest of the class coming in on the repeats from previous stanzas. Or, the reading could be arranged in this kind of way:

Solo 1 What happened to ——?

Group Aiee, ——!

Solo 2 Bread-fruit crushed ——.

Group Aiee, ——!

Solo 3 What happened to Bread-fruit?

Solo 4 Splinter split Bread-fruit,

Solo 2 Bread-fruit crushed ——.

Group Aiee, ——!

Solo 5 What happened to splinter?

Solo 6 Fire burned splinter,

Solo 4 Splinter split Bread-fruit,

Solo 2 Bread-fruit crushed

Group Aiee, ——!

Here, an effect is achieved of a crowd of people talking together of what happened. Individuals come in with new questions, while others give the same answers. Gradually, the sequence is built up.

There are, of course, other ways in which variety can be achieved, even with simple poems such as these. The pupils will almost certainly enjoy experimenting in the ways they read the poems aloud.

5 You

Writing

The pattern of this poem is so simple that pupils can easily add extra lines. For example, can they think of suitably rude descriptions for the person's hair, eyes, arms or feet?

From this controlled beginning, the pupils could write their own poem of insult -- or even praise.

Just for fun, the pupils could try to draw the person described in this poem.

6 A Lament at the Marriage of a Friend

Discussion/Writing

This is an unusual song to sing at such a happy occasion as a marriage. Do the pupils know any other songs to be sung at a wedding? How do these differ from this example?

What do people feel at such an occasion? What are the reasons for any feelings of happiness or anxiety?

7 Two Traditional Lullabies

Choral Reading

Both poems are good for choral reading, in a soft, gentle tone.

Discussion/Writing

What lullabies do the pupils know? They might try to write examples of their own. The important thing in writing lullabies is that the pupils find a suitable means for expressing the particular sentiment of loving, tender care which characterizes most lullabies.

II The Lazy Man

Discussion/Writing

Read in association with Poem 10, *Lazy Man's Song*, this poem prompts discussion of our attitude to laziness. Isn't there in all of us a feeling, similar to that expressed in poem 10, of enjoyment in doing nothing, if only for a short time? What are the pleasures of idleness? This poem leads on to another issue -- what are the problems which a lazy man can face in life? (See also Poem 21, *Praise Song of the Wind*.)

Drama

While the workers work, the lazy man wakes and begins his day. Note the time-sequence involved: 'before' he turns over, stretches and yawns, the other people are busy at their work. In the second stanza, the 'Lazy man' should bring out the contrast between his disappointment at failing to get food and then eager greed at the prospect of free yams.

A good way of starting this poem is to read and mime Poem 16, *He Leaves the Nest*.

12 *A Genuine Gentleman*

Discussion/Writing

How far would the pupils agree with the poet's definition of a 'gentleman'? How important are appearances? What is it which distinguishes a true 'gentleman' from others? (Poem 38, *Ololu - an Egungun* describes an Egungun masquerader.)

Drama

This poem is good for dramatization, with the actors trying to bring out clearly the contrast between the 'gentleman' and the man who is clumsy, slovenly and disrespectfully treated. Perhaps the pupils could then extend the examples given in the poem and improvise situations between the gentleman and the other, for example, while eating, or when they might talk to each other.

13 *A Time to Talk*

Drama

The simple situation of this poem could be acted by two pupils, and improvised dialogue could follow. What sort of conversation would the two men have? They might talk, for example, about their families, the recent gossip, the farm, etc. Pupils are sure to have plenty of ideas. Just to bring out what Frost means in the last lines of the first stanza, perhaps the actors could first demonstrate the scene when the farmer is too busy to stop and talk. How might the visitor react?

Answers to the Riddles

- 1 ice
- 2 the sun
- 3 a burning candle

14 *Song of the Animal World*

Writing

The emphasis in this first small selection of animal-poetry is 'songs' sung by the animals themselves, as it were. Poems 15 and 17 are spoken from the viewpoint of the animal, so we gain a sense of the creature as it sees itself, and this poem is built up with a series of short 'songs' by the fish, bird, and monkey. What animals could the pupils themselves add? They could write a song, for example, for the horse, lion, or dog. What actions does each animal have, which could be described as a pupil mimes it? This could lead quite naturally on to a longer 'Animal Song', modelled on the following poem.

15 *The Snake Song*

Choral Reading

The strong, assertive effect of the repetitious pattern of this poem can be depicted through choral reading, done in a vigorous, *venomous* tone.

Writing

The snake here is proudly asserting his powers. The pupils could attempt to write a similar 'Song', where another animal describes his main characteristics and abilities.

16 *He Leaves the Nest*

Choral Reading and Drama

This poem is deceptively simple, for the poet manages to create a marvellous build-up, each action following the other in a well-observed sequence, to the climax at the end. A miming of the actions to a choral recitation will bring out just how well the behaviour of the cockerel has been observed (for example, could the pupils demonstrate the meaning of 'struts'?) To reflect the build-up to a climax, the reading could be organized in something like the following way – a single voice for the first 7 lines, then an extra voice coming in with each new line, until the final line comes out loud and clear from everyone.

This poem is a good introduction to Poem 11, *The Lazy Mall*.

17 *Oliphant*

Choral Reading

Good for choral reading, with the rhythm and rhyming pattern helping to

create an impression of the elephant stomping along the ground.

Gray as a mouse,
Big as a house,
Nose like a snake,
I make the earth shake,
As I tramp through the grass;
Trees crack as I pass.
With horns in my mouth
I walk in the south,
Flapping big ears,
Beyond count of years
I stump round and round,
Never lie on the ground,
Not even to die.
Óliphaunt am I,
Biggest of all,
Huge, old and tall.
If ever you'd met me,
You'd never forget me.
If ever you do,
You won't think I'm true;
But old Óliphaunt am I,
And I never die.

18 *A Chain-rhyme*

Choral Reading

This is a good poem for choral reading, with small groups perhaps taking up each new line one by one; or, to bring out the force of the final idea in the poem, a new voice or small group being added to the reading with each line, so that there is a build up of volume as the poem progresses. Aim for a song-like quality to the reading, emphasizing the rhythm of the poem, which is created by the oppositional relationship between the two halves of each line.

19 *Prayer before the Dead Body*

Discussion

What does this poem say about the spirits of the dead? What beliefs about the dead do the pupils know? How are these similar to or different from the belief expressed here?

Choral Reading

This is a marvellous poem for choral reading. One effective way of arranging this is to contrast a single voice, or small group, against a larger group taking up the repetitions. For example:

Like swarms of mosquitoes dancing in the evening,
When the night has turned black, *entirely black*,
When the sun has sunk, *has sunk below*,
When the night has turned black
The mosquitoes are swarming
Like dead leaves
Dead leaves in the wind.

If this is read quietly and gently, such an echoing effect (like quiet affirmations of what is being said) helps to create a hypnotic feeling and brings out clearly the atmosphere of mystery and awe, and the wave-like movement of the poem towards the final resolve of the last two lines.

20 *They Ran out of Mud*

Discussion

This poem reminds us that it is very easy to neglect the simple but basic things in life, and that we suffer if we do. What examples of 'mud' – a basic of life which can easily be taken for granted, so that we forget its true value – can the pupils think of?

21 *Praise Song of the Wind*

Choral Reading

Very good for choral reading. The forceful repetitions are quite effective in creating a sense of the wind's power and proud strength, especially with a simple background of imitated wind noise.

22 *A Sudden Storm*

Drama

After the class has discussed the meaning of the poem as a description of a storm, with the emphasis on the vividness of the sensual details, the pupils could then attempt to recreate the scene, making use of sound effects noticed during the discussion, and trees and people moving in the way described in the poem.

Answers to the Riddles

- 1 a European
- 2 the mouth
- 3 a river

24 *The Irresponsible Student*

Drama

As the poem is read aloud, a pupil could mime the behaviour of the 'irresponsible student'.

26 *Tribal Dance*

Choral reading/Drama

The rhythm of this poem, reflecting the dance-rhythms of the drums, is what quickly catches the pupils' interest with this poem. If the poem is read aloud by a small group, an accompaniment of drumming can, indeed, be added. This could lead to a 'performance' with readers/drummers and dancers/Tiv chieftain. It is important to bring out the change registered in passages like: 'And they slept in the shadows . . .' This can be done by topping the drumming and, as the actors sleep, a single voice reading quietly and slightly more slowly.

(quickly) They sat in the shade of a cotton-silk tree
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums
They danced from noon
Till half past three
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums

(slower) And they slept in the shadows
Till the moon rose high
Like a silver florin
In a starry sky

(quicker) And they danced once again
By the cotton silk tree
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums.

(moderate) Drinking palm wine
(pace) And beating the drums
They sang the songs of their race
And an old Tiv chieftain
Raised his head
And the moonlight shone on his face.

The moonlight shone
On the old chief's face
On the moonwhite gleam of his eyes
As they sang with pride
The songs of their race
And saw the silver moon rise.

(pause)
(quickly) They sat in the shade of a cotton-silk tree
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums
They danced from noon
Till half past three
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums

(slower) And they slept in the shadows
Till the moon rose high
Like a silver florin
In a starry sky

(quicker) And they danced once again
By the cotton silk tree
Drinking palm wine
And beating the drums.

Discussion/writing

The previous poem dealt with someone who drinks for personal reasons. Drunkardness is a special, extreme form of drinking (what are the pupils' attitudes to the situation?) In this poem, however, we are presented with drinking as a social activity. In what ways is this different from what is described in Poem 25? How closely does it describe occasions which the pupils themselves have experienced? When do they have social gatherings such as this one? For what reasons? What sort of things happen?

27 *The Market (and also Poems 28, 29 and 30)*

Discussion/Writing

This poem is the first of four which deal with some aspect of the market in

African life. From this general description, we move on (in Poems 28 and 29) to particular details of the market and people found there, and finally (in Poem 30) there is a description of the return of the women from the marketplace. From this series of poems could arise some fruitful work on the local market near the school, or those in the pupils' hometowns or villages. How closely does *The Market* describe marketplaces the pupils know? What is the importance of the market in African life, especially as a social meeting-place? Do Particular groups of people come to the local market, like the Konkomba boys of Poem 28? Are there any special characters, like Alampambo in Poem 29? Is the journey to and from the market as lively as that described in Poem 30? Each of these poems should be seen to relate to the pupils' own experiences, and together can make an extended project for discussion and written-work.

30 *They Walked and Talked* (see also note for Poem 27)

Discussion/Writing

As this, and the next poem, reminds us, there is in Africa a great love of chatty, noisy, bustling crowds. It is part of the great sense of sociability which is so common in Africa. When do people meet together? What do they talk about? (See also Poem 13, *A Time to Talk*).

31 *A Bus Ride*

Drama

This poem is admirably suited to dramatization, with the emphasis on the pupils trying to capture the different types of character described here. As a group of pupils just shouting and moving, as if passengers getting on and off a bus, may be a little undisciplined and messy (at first anyway), they could merely mime the actions and speak the conversations as they arise. From that controlled beginning, the scene could be built up.

32 *To the Anxious Mother*

Discussion

This poem conveys beautifully the atmosphere of awe and excited joy at the birth, so that it is seen as a truly significant event in these people's lives. How do people regard a birth where the pupils come from? How are babies cared for? Could the pupils describe an actual birth in their own family?

33 *Kariuki*

Discussion

Is there any significance attached to the names which the pupils have?
How are names chosen in the areas where the pupils come from?

34 *Grandpa*

Discussion

In thinking about the criticisms which this poem expresses, one aspect of what the old man says which could be considered is whether he is basing his comments on a false, idealized picture of himself and the old ways. He makes his observations on the present with reference to the past - is his view of the past a convincing one? Would his comments still stand, even if it was not? How similar are these sentiments to those made by old people in the pupils' area?

35 *On a Tired Housewife*

Discussion

Although this poem humorously overstates the problems of being a woman about the house, is there some justification to this woman's complaints? What work do women have to do? What is the pupils' view of heaven? Could they suggest the heaven that others might want: for example, a farmer, a teacher, a trader, a thief, or even a school-pupil? (See also Poem 51, *An Old Jamaican Woman Thinks About The Hereafter.*)

Choral reading

The lively rhythm of this poem (helped by the very effective rhyming) makes it suitable for choral reading. The challenge for the pupils is being able to keep together in the reading, despite the fairly long lines and some unusual vocabulary.

Here lies poor woman who always tired,
She lived in a house where help wasn't hired;
Her last words on earth were, 'Dear friends, I am going
To where there's no cooking, or washing, or sewing,
For everything there is exact to my wishes,
For where they don't eat there's no washing of dishes.
I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing,

But having no voice, I'll be quit of the singing.
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never,
I am going to do nothing for ever and ever.

37 *The Fulani Story of the Creation*

Choral reading

Good for choral reading. Like Poem 18, *A Chain-rhyme*, emphasize the rhythm and song-like quality of the poem.

Discussion

What other creation myths do the pupils know? Further examples of African creation myths can be found in *The Origin of Life and Death*, edited by Ulli Beier (Heinemann African Writers Series). In what ways do the different myths relate to one another? What do they tell us about God and man? An important point when thinking about such stories is that they be recognized as something more than quaint tales but as expressions of a people's religious conviction.

38 *Oloru – an Egungun*

Discussion

This poem (and Poems 39 and 40) raise the issue of the relationship of a modern African to the traditional gods and beliefs. The change of the Egungun from a spirit power which roused fear and awe in people to an ordinary man acting out a part is something which can be paralleled by other examples from all over Africa. Can the pupils think of any similar examples from their own area? Are there any traditional spirits or gods which have gone altogether which just a few generations ago were believed in? Are there any which, like Egungun, have become mere shows (often put on for the benefit of tourists)? Is this change a bad thing? Is there any place in modern life for traditional beliefs? Do the pupils share in any way the writer's sense of regret at the decline in power of traditional gods?

39 *Superstition and*

40 *You will Walk in Peace*

Discussion

'Superstition' is usually a derogatory term, indicating that the belief is considered foolish. These poems, however, do not view superstitions in this

way. Are there any similar beliefs which the pupils know of? What do they think – honestly – about them? Is their thinking or action affected in any way by what may be thought of as superstitions?

Choral Reading

Both these poems may be used for choral reading. The tone of voice is different in each case. In the first, there is a firm, assertive tone; in the second, a quieter, conversational tone seems appropriate. With both poems, attention should be paid to the structure. Poem 40 should have a musical effect, created largely by the repetition of the phrase: 'You will walk in peace.'

41 *Two Songs from Dahomey*

Choral Reading

These two songs are good for choral reading.

In the first, an increased sense of urgency could be expressed in the final lines, with their violent images of the earth being mercilessly treated by the sun. The second poem could be treated rather like a Negro spiritual, with soft, sad voices throughout and everyone coming in with the melancholy 'O my load'.

Writing

To the Sun-god reminds us that there are people who claim to be able to control the weather through prayer and chants (see also *The Rain-Maker's Praise Song of Himself*). Perhaps the pupils could compose a song to the 'god of rain' or the 'god of wind', for example, asking for favourable weather.

42 *Song of the Dead*

Choral Reading

A good poem for choral reading, with a firm, clear tone, especially for the final invitation to enjoy life while it is possible ('Come, then. . .').

Writing

What other 'pleasures of life' could the pupils add to the list?

- 43 *Kob Antelope*;
 44 *Buffalo*;
 45 *A newly-born Calf*

Writing

These three poems give us good examples of descriptive poetry on animals. Poems 43 and 44 are particularly fine, as the poet conveys something of the *quality* of the animal itself, as well as giving physical details. Animal-poetry is something which most pupils handle very successfully (see, for example, the poem *Agama Gama Lizard* quoted in the Introduction). Good animals to choose for writing about are those found in the immediate environment (domesticated animals such as cattle, horses or camels; wild animals such as lizards, monkeys, or snakes) or wild animals which, even if never directly seen, are commonly known and distinctive (such as elephants or leopards).

49 *Lone Dog*

Choral Reading

This is an excellent poem for choral reading, with a firm, vigorous rhythm:

I'm a léan dog, a kéen dog, a wíld dog, and lone;
 I'm a róugh dog, a tóugh dog, húnting on my ówn;
 I'm a bád dog, a mad dog, teasing silly shéep
 I love to sit and bóy the moon, to keep fat souls from sléep.

I'll never be a lap dog, lícking dirty féet,
 A sléek dog, a méek dog, crínging for my méat,
 Nót for me the fíreside, the well-filled píate,
 But shút door, and sharp stone, and cuff, and kick, and háte
 Nót for me the óther dogs, rúnníng by my síde,
 Some have run a shórt while, but nóne of them wóuld bíde.
 O mine is still the lóne trail, the hard trail, the bést,
 Wide wind, and wíld stream, and the húngr of the quést.

50 *Jamaican Bus Ride*

Discussion/Writing

How would the pupils describe the peculiar atmosphere of an African bus ride to someone who has never experienced it? This poem conveys marvelously the lively chaos of such a ride, and is packed with vivid physical details. An earlier poem which dealt with a similar theme is Poem 31 *Bus*

Ride. This poem is much more demanding to read, because of the language and the concentration of details. Once pupils have understood it, however, it could be used as a starting-point for their own creative writing (e.g. 'A Ride on a Mammy Wagon').

51 *An Old Jamaican Woman ... and* 52 *Home*

Discussion/Writing

One of the depressing attitudes which is sometimes found among pupils is a rejection of the poor and simple background of many fellow Africans (and often, indeed, of the pupils themselves). 'Civilization' is measured by big cars, Western consumer goods and big houses. The life of those in the villages is dismissed as 'primitive'. Such an attitude should be examined – and these two poems offer an opportunity for such an examination. The lives described in both are simple, and yet valuable and to be respected. The old woman of Poem 51 finds contentment in her way of life; the poet of Poem 52 finds security, love and peace in his poor house, which is 'home'. What values do both poems express? What are the positive things which may be found in the lives of people such as these? Without in any way falsifying the difficulties and hardships of village-life, perhaps the pupils could write something on the following lines: those who come from a village background could write about their home and their attitudes to it; those who do not directly come from such a background could write a character-study of an old villager and his way of life, such as Poem 51 provides.

53 *Wild Oats*

Discussion

This poem continues the theme of home, as the speaker in the poem feels once again the strong bonds that call him back after leaving home, full of ambition to find his own way. What are the ties which keep us attached to our homes? Do the pupils agree with the suggestion in the poem that an assertion of independence is full of difficulties and *not* the way to find 'wisdom and peace'? Instead, like the river which finds its true relation to other things and moves easily to its end, 'wisdom and peace' are to be found within the home and family? Or is it important for people to go on a 'journey' such as this if only to bring a fresh awareness of the value of home? A simple, but most effective – expression of a similar longing for home may be found in Poem 8, *Carry Me*.

- 54 *Farmer's Boy and*
55 *The Herdsboy's Misery*

Discussion/Writing

These two poems together give us glimpses of the life of a herdsboy, one of the commonest jobs for young people in Africa and, indeed, something which quite possibly many of the pupils have done in the past, or even still do during the holidays. Poem 54 is a straight narrative of the herdsboy's day. (How closely does it describe experiences of any of the pupils; Have they had any similarly worrying experiences such as this boy has, when his sheep wander?) Poem 55, however, takes us inside the herdsboy, to show us his thoughts and feelings as he stands by his herd all day. (Is his unhappiness justified? Is he right to feel inferior to those who go to school?)

Another poem which touches on the experience of tending animals is Poem 69, *Young Shepherd Bathing his Feet*.

Drama

The narrative of Poem 54 could be mimed to the teacher's reading.

56 *Banks of Marble*

Choral Reading

This is a good poem for choral reading. One way of arranging this is to have a single voice reading out the main stanzas, with the class coming in for the chorus verses. The basic rhythmic pattern is:

Solo I've travelled round this country
From shore to shining shore;
It really made me wonder,
The things I heard and saw.

I saw the weary farmer
Ploughing his sand and loam;
I heard the auction hammer
Just a knocking down his home.

Chorus But the Banks are made of Marble,
With a guard at every door;
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the farmer sweated for.

Solo I've seen the seaman standing
Idly by the shore;
I've heard the bosses saying,
'Got no work for you no more.'

Chorus But the Banks are made of Marble,
With a guard at every door;
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the seamen sweated for.

Solo I've seen the weary miner
Scrubbing coaldust from his back;
I've heard his children crying,
'We've got no coal to heat the shack.'

Chorus But the Banks are made of Marble,
With a guard at every door;
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the miner sweated for.

Solo I've seen my brothers working
Throughout this mighty land;
I've prayed we'd get together
And together make a stand.

Chorus Then we might own those Banks of Marble,
With a guard at every door;
And we would share those vaults of silver
That we have sweated for.

Discussion

This poem can be combined with the next, *All's Dear but Poor Man's Labour*. Both deal with the theme of social injustice and the sufferings of the poor (examples of which are described in Poems 58 and 59). The solutions offered in each poem are markedly different. The first calls for social action to actually try to change the situation; the second makes a plea for greater charity from the rich, but finally concludes that people should accept their condition and hope for God's mercy. Which of the two do the pupils most agree with? Or are they both wrong?

60 *The Blind Man*

Writing

An active effort of the imagination to try to enter into the situation of others,

such as this poem attempts, can be a useful way of developing our understanding of and sympathy towards people around us, people who normally might be simply passed by (rather as this man is Or the beggar in Poem 59). How should we respond to people such as these? What do the pupils imagine it might be like to be afflicted in this sort of way (for example, to be unable to speak, or hear)?

Answers to the Riddles

- 1 a pair of eyes
- 2 the cotton plant.

65 *Nature*

Discussion/Writing

One of the problems of English as an international language is that some of the concepts which it expresses do not apply to those countries (such as Jamaica, or African countries) which have adopted it. The seasons in Jamaica are not those described by the words 'summer', 'winter', 'autumn', and 'spring'. Just as the poet here describes the year's cycle in terms of what happens and the natural beauties which each time of year brings, perhaps the pupils could write an account of the seasons in their area.

67 *The Dry Season*

Discussion/Writing

This poem can be read at different levels, but for most classes at lower secondary stage the emphasis for discussion should be on the poem as a descriptive piece. This involves not only the purely physical impressions of this season, but also the atmosphere of this time – the feeling of death which is carried through the poem. Notice how even the contrast of the final stanza, with the bursts of activity from the animals set against the background of the wider landscape, sustains this idea of death, as the animals all struggle for survival. How closely does this poem describe the dry season in the area where the pupils come from?

68 *An African Thunderstorm*

Discussion/Writing

Like the last poem, this can reward quite advanced study, and, indeed, for brighter groups of pupils provides excellent examples of successfully used

poetic techniques such as imagery, rhythmic effect, alliteration and onomatopoeia. Even without too much formal study, the poem has a strong impact as a fine piece of descriptive writing, and pupils should be able to understand how the images are working (for example), although they might not be able to define in literary terms how the poem is written. Formal analysis of the poem is not of primary importance at this stage, and indeed could spoil the pupils' enjoyment of the poem if they find such work particularly demanding.

The theme of the poem offers a marked contrast with that of the last poem. Here we have the violence of the storms during the *wet* season. A similar poem which could be read together with this one is Poem 22, *A Sudden Storm*. The pupils could write their own description of a rainstorm.

69 *Young Shepherd Bathing his Feet*

Discussion/Writing

One of the appealing things about this poem is that it deals with what might seem a very ordinary experience, such as perhaps one would not usually think about. The sheer physical delight of easing his feet and the feeling which this rouses in the shepherd is conveyed beautifully in the poem. Just as the shepherd enjoys the very full sensation of this bathe, so the poet describes all the details of the experience. Could the pupils write a similar account of a pleasant physical experience? For example, drinking clear, fresh water after a long, dry walk; or falling asleep after a hard day's work; or even something as simple as stretching after being sat at a desk for a long time. They should try to imagine all the details and describe what it feels like.

70 *Sorghum*

Discussion/Writing

This poem continues the theme of working on the land, though this time it is the farmer's life which is described. How closely does the poem describe harvest-time in the pupils' region?

71 *The Song of the Bottle*

The witty word-play of this poem can be demonstrated with an actual bottle if the pupils do not understand it readily at first.

Discussion/Writing

Although the language of this poem should present no major difficulty, the story itself is an intriguing one which will allow for several interpretations. This is good, and should stimulate quite lively debate among the pupils. Who is this stranger? Just a skull? Or Death itself? Why is Hasana being punished? For her pride? For her refusal to marry? For her willingness to fall in love with mere appearances? After the class has read this poem, the pupils could write a folk tale that they know. It would be too much to expect them to do this in poetic form, however. If just setting 'A Folk Tale' is felt to be too general a topic, the subject matter could be restricted to themes related to this poem, e.g. a tale which illustrates the dangers of love, or the punishment of pride.

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