

2023 National English Olympiad

Study Guide: Self-Study Questions & Suggested Answers

MacNiece, Louis: 'Prayer Before Birth' (1944)

- 1 Q: MacNiece was living in London when he wrote this poem. It was 1944. What was happening at that time that might account for the fearful tone and sense of overarching dread in the poem?
A: It was the time of the 2nd World War, and London had been bombed by the Germans. The poem was written, then, at the height of the Second World War when Europe and much of the world was in violent conflict and chaos. There are many post-modern elements to the poem that reflect the scepticism, irony and rejection of theory and ideology. The world is sometimes seen as meaningless, chaotic and hostile.
- 2 Q: The poem is a dramatic monologue like Browning's *My Last Duchess* or Tennyson's *Ulysses*. Who is the speaker in this poem?
A: An unborn child
- 3 Q: Each stanza begins with the same words. What are they and what is their effect?
A: The words 'I am not yet born' begin each stanza, and they have the effect of ritualistic prayer which often has repetitive phrases to give the prayer structure, or to emphasise a particular point.
- 3 Q: In broad general terms, what is the speaker asking for?
A: The speaker is asking for freedom, warmth, protection, respect, security, etc. and to be protected from all the threats the world might heap on him/her. It may be summed up by saying the unborn child wants love.
- 4 Q: Why might MacNiece have chosen to write the stanzas at a sloping angle and with increasing length? Only the final stanza is not indented. Why?
A: It might be suggestive of labour pains and the birthing process. There is also an increasing urgency about the pleas of the child as he is born into a frightening and violent world that would 'freeze [his/her] humanity'.

The Renaissance (circa 1485 – 1625)

Shakespeare, William: *Hamlet* (extract)

[Not for FAL candidates]

Shakespeare wrote at a time that was characterized by a renewed interest in learning and knowledge. There was a flowering of art, culture, literature and science. The classical writing of Greece and Rome were studied again and huge advances in all forms of learning were made. Painters such as Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci worked in Italy, and the scientist Copernicus (d 1543) was the first to discover that the earth was not the centre of the universe and actually moved round the sun. During this period there was also a rethinking of religious belief, and Martin Luther (d 1546) was one of those who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and began a movement that was later known as the Reformation. The Bible was printed in English, allowing more people to read it. (In England it had previously been published only in Latin.) Many poets and dramatists wrote in English, and of them the most famous and influential was William Shakespeare (d 1616).

Psalm 8

1. O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.
2. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.
3. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
5. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.
6. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:
7. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;
8. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
9. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Having read the extract from *Hamlet* and Psalm 8, answer the following questions:

- 1 Q: Which verses from Psalm 8 are embedded in the *Hamlet* text?
A: Verses 4 to 6
- 2 Q: The source of much of the speech is Psalm 8, but there are distinct differences between the way the psalmist and Hamlet see man. How do they differ?
A: The tone of Psalm 8 is one of wonder and admiration for God's creation, while Hamlet's is one of melancholy and sadness.
- 3 Q: Hamlet ends his speech by referring to man as 'this quintessence of dust'. Why is this phrase significant here? Read the Book of Genesis 2:7 (ie chapter 2, verse 7) and consider what religious service also uses the word "dust".
A: Hamlet is struggling with depression as he finds himself in an impossible position involving moral and ethical questions. He even contemplates suicide in his famous 'To be, or not to be' speech (Act 3, Scene i). In Genesis 2:7 we read that the 'Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground' and in the traditional burial service the words 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' are used. Hamlet's words are thus imbued with an overwhelming sense of sadness and despondency about the plight of mankind, while the psalmist's words embrace a sense of wonder and gladness.
- 4 Q: What do you think Hamlet means when he says that mankind is 'the paragon of animals' and how does this link up with Genesis 1:28?
A: Mankind surpasses all animals or is, perhaps, its ideal or exemplar. In Genesis 1:28 in the New International Version of the Christian Bible, mankind is exhorted to 'Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'. Even more modern Bible translations may interpret the verse as encouraging mankind to take responsibility for environmental issues.
- 5 Q: What do you think is man's responsibility?
(Various answers could be awarded marks according to expression and substantiation.)

Shakespeare, William: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (extract) [Not for FAL candidates]

Note: This play is one of Shakespeare's comedies, but it begins on a disturbing note.

- 1 Q: Briefly outline what happens in the first 45 lines of this extract.
A: The Duke Theseus and his fiancé, Hippolyta, talk about their planned wedding. Egeus, his daughter, Hermia, and two men – Lysander and Demetrius – enter. Egeus complains to Theseus that his daughter has been 'bewitched' by Lysander and is refusing to marry Demetrius who has Egeus's consent to marry her.
- 2 Q: What is Theseus's advice to Hermia?
A: She must obey her father 'as a god'.
- 3 Q: Hermia asks Theseus what 'The worst that may befall [her] in this case,/If [she] refuse[s] to wed Demetrius. What is Theseus's reply?
A: He explains that she must either die or become a nun.
- 4 Explain in plain English what Hermia says in reply to Theseus's explanation.
 - 4.1 Q: Who is 'his lordship'?
A: Demetrius
 - 4.2 Q: Explain, in particular, why she uses the phrase 'unwished yoke'? What connotations does 'yoke' have?
A: The word 'yoke' implies a burden or oppression that her 'soul' or inner being does not wish to agree to. Should she marry Demetrius he would be her lord and master whom she would have to obey.

- 1 Q: Note how Juliet refers to her father as 'my lord and father'. What does this imply about her relationship with her father?
A: He has total control over her and she is supposed to obey him.
- 2 Q: After initially being sympathetic towards Juliet and assuming that her tears are for his 'brother's son' who is her murdered cousin, he asks his wife if she has 'delivered to her our decree?' What is the tone of this question?
A: It is dictatorial. The word 'decree' implies absolute authority.
- 3 Q: How would you describe Capulet's mood in the rest of this scene?
A: He becomes increasingly angry, irrational and aggressive. He even threatens to beat her when he says 'My fingers itch' and also curses her as a 'hilding' or person of no worth. He sinks into unpleasant mimicry of Juliet's pleas and threatens to 'pardon' her in a way she might not expect ie punish her severely.
- 4 Q: Explain the line 'And you be mine, I'll give you to my friend'.
A: At the time the play is set, fathers like Capulet had total control over their families and he invokes this right to give Juliet to whomever he wishes.

'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' and 'The Nymph's reply to the Shepherd'

Read these poems by Marlowe and Raleigh, and answer the following questions:

- 1 Q: Which persona (the Shepherd or Nymph) is idealistic? Justify your answer by quoting from the poem.
A: The Nymph is the realistic one as she foresees the future and warns that 'Time drives flocks from field to fold', 'Rocks grow cold' and 'flowers do fade'.
- 2 Q: What does the Shepherd really want?
A: He wants, to put it politely, 'a roll in the hay' and to enjoy his love in an idyllic world where 'Melodious birds sing' and they may forever their 'pleasures prove' in a seemingly endless summer.
- 3 Q: Which persona would ascribe to the 'carpe diem' philosophy? Explain your answer.
A: The Shepherd ascribes to the *carpe diem* philosophy as he wants to live only in the present with no thought for the future. He has, in the Nymph's words, a 'honey tongue', but has no plans for coping with hard times and the future in family and responsibility is important.
- 4 Q: Which persona is, in your opinion, the more responsible? Why?
A: The final stanza of the Nymph's reply says it all. She is the more responsible as she sees the future and the burdens it might bring.
- 5 Q: Which poem is more attractive to young people?
(Various answers are acceptable. Many young people would say that they would rather throw caution to the wind and live in the present, as the future is uncertain.)

Blake, William: 'The Lamb' & 'The Tyger'

[Not for FAL candidates]

Blake is a poet that we call a 'Romantic'. In Europe Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d 1778) promoted the doctrine of Romanticism that propounded that civilization and society had corrupted mankind and that only in a state of nature would man ever find happiness. From his ideas flowed a humanitarianism that revered the simple and humble people (peasants) and the writers, artists and musicians stressed the emotions and imagination. Beethoven (d 1827), Schubert (d 1856) and Chopin (d 1840) were some of the musical composers, while Blake (d 1827), Wordsworth (d 1850) and Shelley (d 1822) were some of the poets. Mary Shelley (d 1851) wrote *Dr Frankenstein and his Monster* during this period.

Read the two Blake poems and answer the following questions:

(Note: Blake had an idiosyncratic way of spelling tiger/tyger. You may use either spelling.)

1 Q: To whom or what are both poems addressed?

A: The Lamb and the Tyger are being addressed.

2 Q: Blake wrote a work called *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. It falls into two parts, the first being poems associated with childhood, the pastoral and all that is idyllic, while the second is associated with adulthood, corruption, cruelty and authoritarianism. Into which half do you think each of these poems fits?

A: 'The Lamb' falls into *Songs of Innocence*, while 'The Tyger' falls into *Songs of Experience*.

3 Q: In stanza 2 of 'The Lamb' there are distinct Christian references. Write down one of these references.

A: The two lines 'He is called by thy name,/ For he calls himself a Lamb' are references to Christ.

4 Q: There are many words and phrases in 'The Tyger' that are frightening. Quote one or two of these.

A: Frightening words and phrases include 'fearful symmetry', 'dread hand', 'furnace' and 'forests of the night'.

5 Q: Who do you think the word "he" refers to in the third line of the second last stanza of 'The Tyger'?

A: This is debatable. It could be God or the Devil or even mankind.

6 Q: Read the last lines of stanza 1 and stanza 6 of 'The Tyger'. What word has been changed? What is the effect of this change?

A: The word 'Could' has been changed to 'Dare'. The effect is to increase the fearful tone.

7 Q: There is no definite answer to the question of what exactly the lamb and the tiger symbolise. What do you think they symbolise?

(Various answers could be given, including good and evil; two sides of God; God and Satan or even two sides of mankind.)

The Victorians (1832 -1900)

There were enormous advances in progress and science during this period that resulted in an industrial revolution that saw the proliferation of factories. The steam engine provided power in industry and there was material prosperity for many, but on the other hand, the working classes suffered and slums grew round the industrialized cities. Socialism and political ideas germinating from the theories of Karl Marx and others sprang up. Trade unions were begun to protect the workers and a series of labour laws were passed through parliament. The right to vote was increasingly extended so that most men were enfranchised. Darwin published his *The Origin of Species* (1859) that theorised that all species evolved by a process called mutation. This caused bitter controversy between religious conservatives and the scientific intellectuals. These issues inevitably came up in the works of the writers of the day. The novelist Charles Dickens, for example, exposed the plight of women, children and the poor who had no rights and worked in the factories and the mines. The poets Alfred Tennyson (d 1892), Robert Browning (d 1889) and Matthew Arnold (d 1888) also challenged these issues in their poems.

Read the *Oliver Twist* extract and answer the following questions:

- 1 Q: Dickens wrote many novels and some short stories and plays. They were very popular at the time – they might be viewed as the soapies of the day. Some were serialised in magazines. Can you name any other Dickens's works?

A: *David Copperfield*, *Pickwick Papers*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Bleak House*, *The Christmas Carol*, *Domby and Son* and *Great Expectations* were some and in addition he was a journalist and wrote many newspaper articles.

- 2 Q: At whom did he aim his work?

A: He aimed his work at the rising middle classes. Before this time few could read as mass education was only being slowly introduced during this (Victorian) period.

- 3 Q: What was happening education-wise in our country at that time? When was your own school founded? Is there a school in your district that was founded in the Victorian period?

A: Various answers accepted here. Education was not compulsory in South Africa at the time Dickens wrote, but a few schools were founded mainly for the children of the rising merchant middle classes. Lovedale College and Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape began serving the Black population under the auspices of the Wesleyan and Scottish missionary churches between 1824 and 1850, while Adams College began in 1853 under the United Congregational church in Natal.

- 4 Q: Describe the circumstances that drove young Oliver to ask for 'some more'.

A: He was elected by chance by the other boys because they were so hungry. One boy threatened to eat the boy who slept next to him.

- 5 Q: Modern sociologists would describe the situation the boys found themselves in as having "scarce resources". In this case there was a scarcity of food for the boys. We know how the boys in Dickens's novel reacted to resolve the problem. It simply did not work! Can you think of scarce resources in your district? What do people do to resolve the problem? Are people altruistic and giving under these circumstances?

A: Scarcity of many basic utilities and needs are abundant in our SA society – water, basic food, electricity and medical care are just some that are often lacking. How people resolve the problems are often violent. Hungry people are seldom altruistic.

- 6 Q: The 'gentleman in the white waistcoat' who was, no doubt an official in the workhouse, predicted that Oliver Twist would be hung. What did he mean by this?

A: He predicted that Oliver would end up being hung (or in modern English 'hanged') as a criminal.

- 7 Q: The last paragraph of the extract in your anthology begins 'As I purpose to show in the sequel whether ...'. Who is this 'I'?

A: It is the persona who is writing this piece, but given that Dickens was publishing his works in sequels or episodes and that he was very well known at the time, it is probably Dickens, himself, who is coming through as an authorial voice.

- 8 Q: Find a synonym for 'mar' and write down the antecedent for 'it' in the sentence fragment: 'I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all)'.
- A: Synonym – lessen/destroy; antecedent of 'it' – narrative.
- 9 Q: Note that the paragraph is made up of one long sentence. Pick out the main clause in this sentence.
- A: 'I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative' is the main clause that carries the main idea in the sentence.
- 10 Q: Dickens and other Victorian writers often wrote very long sentences. Modern writers use much shorter sentences. Why do you think this change has happened?
- A: Long sentences are often difficult to understand and need deep concentration to comprehend. It is generally better style to keep your sentences short and to the point.
- 11 Q: Why do you think Dickens might have written this final paragraph in his narrative at this point of the story?
- A: He wanted people to buy the sequel to this instalment.
(Dickens released most of his novels in monthly instalments. To encourage readers to buy the next instalment, he needed to create a sense of anticipation at the end of each episode.)
- 12 Q: If you were to wave a magic wand at this point in the narrative, what would you like to happen to Oliver?
- (Any appropriate answer may be acceptable.)

Read Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children' (1843) and answer the following:

- 1 Q: Read the British parliament's 'Laws restricting child labour in England' that are reproduced in your anthology. Note the date that they came into law and then note the dates that Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children' were published. What does this tell you about the conditions under which children were working at the time and whether the law was being followed?
- A: It is clear that it took some time for the law to be properly imposed and child labour continued in Britain and her colonies for some time, however during the second half of the 19th century many more laws were passed in Britain that increasingly protected children, workers and the vulnerable. While these laws filtered down to the British colonies there were many parts of the world that continued to exploit the young and the workers.
- 2 Q: Try and explain the significance of the epigraph.
- A: The epigraph is taken from Euripides' *Medea*. In the play the Medea shockingly murders her children.
- 3 Q: Barrett Browning uses many archaic words and expressions in her poem. Quote five of these and write them in a complete sentence. Remember that each word or phrase requires its own set of quotation marks.
- A: Barrett Browning uses archaic words and phrases such as 'ye', 'ere', 'They are weeping bitterly', 'grave rest' and 'seek' in her poem.
- 4 Q: Both currently, and at the time of writing, Barrett Browning has been accused of being too sentimental and melodramatic in the poem, yet it was well received at the time of writing. Why might she have been accused of being melodramatic? Do you think it might have been justified?
- A: The repetitive use of words such as 'weeping', 'young' and 'O' together with the lamentations and pleadings of the over-worked and abused children certainly could be cause for an accusation of being over sentimental and melodramatic. If, however, the poem helped to draw attention to the plight of the child labourers and other vulnerable and exploited people, then, amen to that.
(PS - Look up the meaning of 'amen'.)

Modernism (circa 1900 – 1950)

The South African War, the First World War (WW1) and the Second World War changed intellectual thought enormously. Poets such as Hardy, who wrote about the SA war, and Owen who wrote about the First World War, were scathing in their condemnation of the atrocities of war and exposed the horror of war by writing about it before the age of film and TV. Radio, telephones and later movies made huge advances in mass communication and the intellectual movement of modernism ushered in, especially by the horror of WW1, overthrew traditional values and religious belief. Nihilism swept through the thinking of intellectuals, writers and artists collapsing the cosy and stress-free religious beliefs of the past.

Read T S Eliot's 'Preludes' (1917) and answer the following questions:

Do not try to puzzle out a "meaning" for every line or section of the poem; rather absorb the overall "feel" of the poem. Read it as a series of fragmented impressions or preludes that build up to the important lines near the end.

- 1 Q: What do you understand by the word 'prelude'?
A: It is an introduction of some sort. Note here it is used in the plural.
- 2 Q: Read sections I to IV up to 'assume the world'. List some of the words and phrases that dominate the atmosphere Eliot creates.
A: Some significant words and phrases might include 'burnt-out ends of smoky days', 'vacant lots', 'stale smell of beer', 'soiled hands' and 'sordid images' and 'soul stretched tight'.
- 3 Q: What is the general mood or atmosphere that these images create?
A: They create a depressing mood and grimy, sordid atmosphere.
- 4 Q: What are 'these images' that Eliot refers to near the end of the poem?
A: They are probably the images described in sections 1 to 1V above.
- 5 Q: Quote the two lines to which the 'fancies' refer.
A: 'The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.'
- 6 Q: To what does this 'suffering thing' refer?
A: Mankind

cummings, ee: 'in just' (1920)

[Not for FAL candidates]

- 1 Q: What does the title suggest about spring in this poem?
A: It is the very beginning of spring.
- 2 Q: In what way might eddie, bill, betty and isbel be associated with spring?
A: They are all young and, in the same way as spring is a time of new birth and nature awakening, so too are they at the beginning of their lives.
- 3 Q: Cummings has coined three compound words. The first is 'Just-spring'. Write down the other two and suggest what connotations these words might have.
A: The other coined words are 'mud-luscious' and 'puddle-wonderful' that have connotations of fun, joy and wetness that indicates growth and renewal.
- 4 Q: How would you describe the world the children inhabit? How do they feel about life? Quote to substantiate your answer.
A: It is a fun-filled world in which the innocent children excitedly 'come / running from marbles', breathlessly run their names together and 'come dancing' from their games.
- 5 Q: Why is it significant that both the boys and the girls come "from" their games?
A: They are leaving their childhood and innocent games behind them.
- 6.1 Q: Against this world cummings introduces a sombre and threatening note. What is it?
A: It is the 'balloonMan'.

6.2 Q: Explain your answer to 6.1.

A: He is described as 'goat-footed' that suggests he is a satyr like the mythological Pan figure who is associated with drunkenness, debauchery and wild living. He could also be associated with the devil that has been depicted as having cloven hooves. It is worrying that this seemingly innocent 'balloonman' is calling the children to his side.

Anand, Mulk Raj: 'The Lost Child' (1934)

1 Q: While the story is written from a third-person point of view, the reader views the world from which character's perspective?

A: The child's perspective.

2 Q: What mood does the writer create as he describes the family walking towards to village in which there is a fair? Quote to substantiate your answer.

A: The mood is a happy one in which 'The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the shrill joy and wonder of this vast glory'. There are many phrases and sentences that could be used to substantiate this joyous, happy mood.

3 Q: What is the recurring call that the parents make to the child? What does it tell us about the attitude of the parents towards the child?

A: "Come, child, come" is the recurring call and it suggests that they love the child and are concerned about him.

4 Q: Why are the parents having to call the child so often?

A: The child is constantly running off as he is distracted and tempted by the wonder of the world around him. He forgets to stay close to them.

5 Q: Read the paragraph beginning 'As they neared the village ...' and suggest why this might be seen as a pivotal paragraph in the structure of the short story?

A: The paragraph anticipates the child losing his parents in the confusing 'whirlpool of the fair' and, from this point on, the parents are absent and are only recalled in the child's mind.

6 Q: Check the last few words on the next four paragraphs. Start with the paragraph beginning 'A sweetmeat-seller ...' and end the paragraph beginning 'A juggler...'. What do you notice about how each paragraph ends?

A: Each paragraph ends similarly. The child is constantly 'moved on' and 'walked on farther' away from his parents who were no doubt searching for him.

7 Q: The happy mood of the funfair is swiftly changed to a nightmare mood for the child. How has the writer used sentence structure to convey this mood to the reader in the paragraph beginning 'There was no reply'?

A: The writer uses short sentences reflecting the child's sudden movements and panic.

8 Q: Whom do you blame for the child being lost?

A: The child was probably running wildly in his excitement and might have again run too far from his parents, but, ultimately the adults have to take responsibility for their young child.

9 Q: How does the kind man, who rescues the child, attempt to soothe and distract him? What is significant about the things he offers the child? What does the child want?

A: They are all things the child yearned for previously, but now in his distraught state, he rejects them as the only thing he wants are his parents.

10 Q: What does the story tell us about a child's needs?

A: Material things are relatively unimportant and the most important thing in a child's life is the warmth and love of his/her parents.

11 Q: There are no proper nouns in the story. The characters are all simply named 'the child' or 'the parents'. Why do you think the writer did this?

A: It gives the story a universal appeal. While this story is set in Asia, the child-parent issues it delves into are common to all mankind.

Paton, Alan: 'To a small boy who died at Diepkloof Reformatory' (circa 1933)

Alan Paton was a South African writer who was a fierce opponent of apartheid and wrote the well-known novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. He was head of Diepkloof Reformatory that catered for black youths when he wrote this poem.

- 1 Q: In broad general terms explain what this 'vast machinery' is that the 'Small offender' does not understand.
A: The 'vast machinery' refers to the administrators of the state such as the police, magistrates, etc. that are required to have a young offender committed to a reformatory.
- 2 Q: The first stanza sums up the child's sentence to be held in a reformatory and his death. What particular document, certificate and warrant do the second, third and fourth stanzas summarize?
A: The second stanza summarizes events surrounding his 'document of birth'; the third stanza summarizes events surrounding his 'certificate of Death' while the fourth stanza summarizes events surrounding his 'warrant of committal' to the reformatory.
- 3 Q: Why do you think Paton introduces these impersonal official documents into his poem? What do they highlight?
A: They highlight how the bland machinery of the state overwhelms the human tragedy of the small boy.
- 4 Q: In the third stanza the seventh line begins: 'She pours her generous abundance ...'. Who/what is this 'She'?
A: Literally it refers to 'earth' two lines above, but in figurative terms it refers to the adults of this South African earth who so neglected and mistreated this unloved, vulnerable child.
- 5 Q: The line 'Neither wind nor snow nor any heat of sun' faintly echoes a dirge 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun'. Google it and state by whom it was written and from which play it is taken.
A: Shakespeare wrote it in *Cymbeline*.
- 6 Q: Paton uses the word 'commit' in various forms in the poem. Explain the two contrasting meanings that poignantly refer to what happened to this boy.
A: The boy was committed or sentenced to a reformatory and later he is committed or buried in the ground.
- 7 Q: What does the word 'dust' remind one of in this context?
A: It reminds one of the words in the Christian burial service: 'ashes to ashes; dust to dust'.
(The word is also used to great effect in Hamlet's soliloquy on page 3 of the Anthology.)

Read Plomer's 'The Wild Doves at Louis Trichardt' and answer the following questions:

- 1 Q: Plomer has structured his poem chronologically. Briefly explain how this is done.
A: The first stanza describes the morning, the second the midday and the third the afternoon.
- 2 Q: Briefly describe the activity in the town as the day passes.
A: In the morning and during the midday there is much work by both humans and the natural world of animals, birds and insects, but by the late afternoon the heat has driven most to sleep in the shade.
- 3 Q: What figure of speech might be used to describe 'Bubbling their coolest colloquies'?
A: Onomatopoeia
- 4 Q: What does this poem imply about the nature of Man?
A: He is evil, and Africa is better without him.

Spender, Stephen: 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum' (1964)

Note: The poem is relatively straight-forward and probably reflects the wishes and feelings of many teachers of language who are faced with classes from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- 1 Q: What is the tone of the persona-teacher in the final stanza?
A: It is initially one of pleading and possibly anger directed at the 'governor, inspector, visitor' to do something to open up the world to the learners who are confined by their world of poverty, malnutrition and limited opportunities. In the end it changes to one of wonder at the opportunities offered by language, literature and education.
- 2 Q: Imagine what it must have been like to be a pupil in a classroom like the one in the poem. How interested would you be in your lessons? Why?
(Your answer will depend upon the extent of your imagination and your experience of similar situations.)

Mtshali, Oswald: 'An Abandoned Bundle' (circa 1970)

- 1 Q: What is this 'Abandoned Bundle'?
A: It is a new-born child that has been abandoned by its mother on a 'rubbish heap'.
- 2 Q: The White City Jabavu is a part of Soweto outside of Johannesburg. With what does Mtshali compare this part?
A: He compares it with a sore oozing pus. The morning mist and smoke mingle like pus.
- 3 Q: The child is compared to a 'Baby in a Manger'. What does this imply about the child?
A: It is compared to the Christ child and, like Jesus, completely innocent.
- 4 Q: The mother is depicted as innocent. Do you think she is innocent? Why might she have abandoned her infant?
A: The mother is not innocent, but it might be understandable that young women like her might find themselves in desperate circumstances and without any resources to feed or care for a child resulting from an unplanned pregnancy. Debilitating poverty, lack of education and an unsupportive community might lead to this horrifying scenario.

Van Wyk, Chris: 'Relatives' (1996)

Chris van Wyk was a South African writer who died in 2014. He wrote for both adults and children, and this story won him the SANLAM Award for Short Fiction in 1996.

- 1 Q: What was the reason that the twenty-one-year-old narrator went down to the Cape?
A: He wanted to write a novel drawn from his own family roots and his family came from the Cape.
- 2 Q: The narrator refers to a riddle and a manual that are "outside" of the text. Identify the riddle and say what the manual is about.
A: The riddle is about the three men who are two fathers and two sons and the manual is a writer's manual.
- 3 Q: These references are what we call metafictional references. What effect do these have on the reader?
A: The narrator helps the reader distance him/herself from the plot every so often by referring to riddles, stories or texts beyond this story.
- 4 Q: The first-person narrator refers to, or gives us, several stories within this short story. The first are the 'anecdotes' and 'detailed sagas' of the old men in Carnarvon. He next begins 'a story which [he] had already tested on [his] uncle in Carnarvon'. Who originally tells this story? What is this story about?
A: The story is told to the narrator by his travelling companion named Georgie Abrahams. It is about how he (Georgie) murdered his fellow traveller as he had stolen some of his possessions.

5 Q: The twenty-one-year-old narrator quickly realizes that the story is a lie and equates it with other fanciful tales. Why did Georgie tell the story to the narrator and what was the purpose of the other tales told by his mother?

A: Georgie was warning the narrator not to steal from him and his mother's stories were also warnings.

6 Q: The story then takes on an ominous tone as the three jovial companions leave the train and the narrator is left with the two khaki-clad brothers. What did the narrator realise about the brothers and what was the conversation about that 'froze [his] blood'?

A: He realised the brothers were from a reformatory and were therefore young delinquents. They related how they were going to bury their older brother who had been the leader of a gang and then 'vowed to avenge his death' by killing his murderers in a gruesome way.

7 Q: What changes the mood in the compartment back to a happy one?

A: One of the brothers realizes that the narrator is a relative of theirs. They then happily share their meal with him.

8 Q: The last part of the story brings us back to the metafictional nature of the story when the narrator reads a story or 'report' in the newspaper describing the mayhem in parts of the Western Township where the 'streets were running with the blood of gangsters' and his two relatives had been killed. We, the readers, realize the whole story is a flashback. It makes us question the validity of the story. Is there any truth in the story? Is it just like the one about the murder on the train? Are there grains of truth in it?

A: The story is a fiction, but, by emphasizing the metafictional nature of the story, we are encouraged to look for underlying truths such as the plight of the brothers who were raised in disadvantaged circumstances and the almost inevitability of their subsequent violent deaths.

English Alive

The following three poems by Evans, Pinchuck and Hau-Yoon were all first published in *English Alive*, an annual anthology that is produced by the Western Province Branch of the South African Council for English Education (SACEE).

These pieces have been chosen as they reflect the ideas of your near contemporaries on the theme of the fragility of man and his place in the world.

Hau-Yoon, Jonathan: 'Sonnet to a Sk8r Girl' (2003)

1 Q: Briefly outline the structure of the traditional sonnet form.

A: It has fourteen lines.

It is usually divided into an octet and sestet or four quartets followed by a rhyming couplet.

It is written in iambic pentameter rhythmic pattern.

It has a formal rhyme scheme.

2 Q: Does this sonnet conform to the traditional form?

A: In general, yes it does.

It has fourteen lines, is divided into an octet and a sestet, and it is predominantly written in iambic pentameter.

The rhyme scheme is also relatively conventional.

3 Q: In one sentence briefly sum up how the octet and sestet differ in content.

A: The octet describes the girl while the sestet questions what makes the girl special, and finally answers these questions.

4 Q: The rhyming couplet at the end sums up what makes this girl special. Quote the line that encapsulates her uniqueness.

A: 'She has an open mind and caring heart.'

