**Do now:**

1. **What is a stanza?**
2. **What rhyme scheme might we expect to see in a Shakespearean sonnet??**
3. **What poetic device is used here?**

*‘I want them to waterski*

*across the surface of a poem’*

**Read the following poem (on the next page) and then answer these questions:**

1. What is the main idea in this poem?

2. Who might the speaker be?

3. Why might the subject of the poem use ‘a coat for a pillow’?

4. What technique is used to describe the sea’s actions in the second stanza?

5. Find an example of onomatopoeia in the poem, why might the poet use this word?

**At Sea**

Is the writer a sailor? A poem about/by a ship a fisherman? ‘At sea’ could also mean that the speaker is a bit uneasy and feels a bit lost, uncertain.

The poem is written in free verse and 3rd person perspective. The tone is calm and quiet. Lots of sibilance – ‘s’ – sounds in the first stanza echo the sound of the sea but also creates a sinister tone…could they suggest something bad may happen?

With nothing to do now he’s gone

she dusts the house,

sweeps the bleached veranda clear of sand.

The broom leaves a trail of grit on the step,

a sprinkling under the hook where it hangs.

The unnamed woman seems to feel lost and may be anxious about being on her own in the house. ‘he’s gone’ could suggest ‘he’ is either dead – lost at sea – or away, working on the ocean. She is keeping herself busy. There is something on her mind.

A coat for a pillow,

She sleeps downstairs,

Dreams the loathed ocean is coming for her,

alliteration - the hard ‘c’ sounds violent and harsh emphasising the danger of the ocean here

Climbing the cliffs,

Creeping in through the door.

personification – the sea is threatening, she is concerned for her loved one, the danger of the sea and the harm it can do

She wakes to the screaming gulls,

his shirts on the line

The ‘screaming’ of the gulls sounds frightening, contrasting against the calmness of the first stanza, creating a vivid image, giving a ‘nightmarish’ feeling – just like her experience in stanza two – replicating her fear of sailors screaming as they drown.

and the high tide breakers’

chill in her arms.

*Jennifer Copley*

enjambment – lines running in to the next without a punctuation stop – creates a feeling of being out of control in this situation.

*veranda – a long porch type structure, usually wooden that runs along the front of a house*

*loathed – intensely disliked*

**Exam question:**

**How does the writer present the speaker’s feelings in ‘At Sea’?**

Model answer:

At the beginning of the poem she is doing her chores but doesn’t seem to be taking care as she does them. ‘The broom leaves a trail of grit’ suggests that she is not taking care as she cleans. In other words the poet makes us feel that she has other things on her mind. More specifically the imagery of ‘a trail of grit’ shows that she doesn’t really care about the sand all over the veranda, she is probably worrying ‘now he’s gone’ and cleaning is unimportant at this time. Moreover the use of enjambment, where the lines run into each other, gives this poem a feeling of a loss of composure or control over events; the woman is worried and fears for his safety at sea.

**Now your turn** (aim for at least two, preferably three paragraphs)…

*breakers – waves*