

Conflict Poetry Knowledge Organiser – Emotional

<u>POEM SUMMARIES</u>	<u>Links to context (AO3)</u>
<p><u>Extract from ‘The Prelude’ by William Wordsworth (1850):</u> This autobiographical epic poem is set on a lake in the English Lake District. The speaker narrates an incident in which he finds and steals a shepherd’s boat in “an act of stealth”. Being typical of Romantic poetry, the experience of rowing on the lake is described as a beautiful and peaceful until the tone changes and nature causes the speaker to panic and return the boat. However, the experience isn’t forgotten and haunts the boy for many days afterwards. Although he is unsure what is happening to him, it is clear that the experience causes an epiphany as nature teaches him a moral lesson and the poet feels guilty for taking the boat without permission.</p>	<p>Wordsworth is writing this pastoral poem based on experiences during his formative years in the English Lake District. This section of the epic poem, subtitled <i>Growth of the Poet’s Mind</i>, is focused on an event in which he stole a boat and feels that nature tried to teach him a moral lesson as a result. Being a Pantheist (worships nature) and Romantic, nature is presented as both beautiful and powerful. Also typical of Romantic poetry is the focus on the individual’s connection with nature, away from the urban cities and Industrial Revolution.</p>
<p><u>‘What Were They Like?’ by Denise Levertov (1967):</u> This poem is split into two stanzas: the first lists 6 questions and the second stanza provides the answers to each. This creates the impression almost of a television interview. It is clearly an anti-war piece of propaganda, presenting the American soldiers as barbaric and the Vietnamese civilians as simple and peaceful yet being destroyed by the might of the American forces. Although one might consider it slightly patronising towards the Vietnamese, “most were peasants,” Levertov’s aim is to create sympathy for the majority of innocent, highlighting the grotesque destruction of the innocent, particularly children, and describing a future in which the Vietnamese culture has been destroyed.</p>	<p>The Vietnam War was one of the first televised wars, therefore the world were able to witness the horrors and greater sympathy was evoked for the Vietnamese civilians. The American army intervened in the civil war between North and South Vietnam (South Vietnam wanted to preserve its independence, North Vietnam wanted to unite the country). America sent masses of military personnel to support South Vietnam, which many at home perceived to be morally wrong. In America, there were many protests and movements to withdraw American troops and involvement. The North’s use of guerrilla warfare meant the American army was eventually humiliated. This is very clearly a piece of anti-war propaganda.</p>
<p><u>‘The Class Game’ by Mary Casey (1981):</u> This poem is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker directly addresses [a] member[s] of the middle or upper classes. The speaker is confident and challenges prejudice based on class backgrounds. One long stanza is used to present a sustained outpouring or outburst of anger and annoyance. The use of rhetorical questions throughout the poem puts the reader under pressure. She also uses juxtaposition by placing slang or colloquial words alongside standard English or by presenting the contrast in its physical form, such as “did I drop my unemployment card/Sitting in your patio (we have a yard)?” This not only highlights the contrast between the lifestyles but trivialises the class distinctions. Ultimately, Casey ends the poem with a defiant tone, stating her pride in being working class.</p>	<p>Little is known about Casey except that she was a housewife from Liverpool who contributed to a literary magazine, ‘Voices’, from 1972-1984. The poets were not professional but ordinary, working class people writing about ordinary events in daily life. Many were consequently snobbish about the collections, questioning the magazine’s literary value. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister and the working class felt the repercussions with job cuts due to recession and indirect taxation which taxed everybody, regardless of income. Some argue that today, we live in a classless society but more than enough, the distinction is vivid.</p>
<p><u>‘Half Caste’ by John Agard (1996):</u> Agard directs this poem at anybody who uses the term “half-caste”. He uses humour and sarcasm to ridicule the term and challenge its use. The tone becomes growingly angry at prejudice based on race and he uses lots of famous cultural references such as Picasso and Tchaikovsky, who mixed colours and notes to make infamous works that have been acclaimed for generations, to highlight that some of the greatest successes in life come from mixing, thus mixing races is not a bad thing. The repetition of “explain yusef!” has an accusatory tone and forces the reader to consider their use of the term. It also sounds as if the speaker is hurt by the term, thus making the reader consider the implications of using the derogatory expression.</p>	<p>Agard was born in the former British colony of Guyana and moved to Britain in 1977. He uses Caribbean accent and dialogue to bring Guyanese identity to his work. ‘Caste’ derives from the Latin ‘castus’ meaning pure, thus the term “half caste” is offensive as it derives from the Latin meaning of being ‘half pure’. Having moved to Britain in 1977, Agard is sure to have faced and witnesses some of the prejudices held by the public. He is foremost challenging the use of the term “half-caste” but more widely, he is challenging racial discrimination which is arguable still present in society.</p>
<p><u>‘No Problem’ by Benjamin Zephaniah (1996):</u> Zephaniah speaks directly to the reader about being a victim of “playground taunts/ An racist stunts.” However, he holds no grudges but uses the poem to attack racism in general and racial stereotyping in particular. The title of the poem, “No problem” is ironic since racism and racial stereotyping have no place in civilised society. He is confident that “I/Black am/is not de problem”, the racist attitudes are. The first stanza deals with the many stereotypes white people have of black people, which the poet is able to deal with but thinks is unfair.</p>	<p>Zephaniah grew up in Jamaica and Birmingham and consequently uses a mixture of Black British and Standard English words in his poem. He left school at 14 and was dyslexic; this could be why he does not abide by punctuation and grammatical rules. However, it could also be evidence of him standing up against the rules and expectations. He writes a lot of poetry celebrating cultural diversity in Britain yet declined an OBE from the Queen because he felt it would be a symbol of accepting the oppression by the British Empire.</p>

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Picture	Quotation	Explanation	Picture	Quotation	Explanation
1) 	“troubled pleasure” (‘The Destruction of Sennacherib’ by Wordsworth)	Wordsworth uses this juxtaposition to intimate he knows that stealing the boat is morally wrong but he gains so much joy from being at out on the lake with nature. However, nature knows he has done something immoral which is why he is unable to fully enjoy the moment.	6) 	“Well mate! A cleaner is me mother... And I’m proud of the class that I come from. ” (‘The Class Game’ by Mary Casey)	The exclamatory sentence and use of “mate” is confident and direct, forcing the reader to pay attention to the last sentence of the poem in which the speaker lists the working class jobs different members of their family have. There is no shame here and instead, the speaker uses a monosyllabic final line to stress how proud they are of their class.
2) 	“ Upreared its head.” (‘The Destruction of Sennacherib’ by Wordsworth)	Nature is being personified here to make it sound imposing and intimidating, finding young Wordsworth in his immoral act and providing an opportunity for an epiphany. The verb “upreared” makes one think of a powerful animal objecting to demanding to be heard. Being a Pantheist, Wordsworth believed God was present in every part of nature, thus the mountain is able to have such an influential impression on him.	7) 	“ Excuse me/ standing on one leg/ I’m half-caste ” (‘Half-caste’ by John Agard)	Although it might appear the speaker is being polite at the start of the poem, the sarcastic second line ensure we understand he is angered and disgusted to the people he is speaking to, those who use the term “half-caste”. The image of somebody standing on one leg is ridiculous and silly, indicating the use of the term is also silly. It is also interesting that by standing on one leg, one is more vulnerable to be knocked over, implying the term has an impact on those it is used to describe.
3) 	“...but after their children were killed/ there were no more buds.” (‘What Were They Like?’ by Denise Levertov)	The connective “but” indicates a change in tone; from a culture which is rich with beautiful flowers, it has been destroyed by the American bombings. Levertov uses the image of “children” being “killed” to evoke greater sympathy for the Vietnamese as children are perceived to be innocent. It also draws a connection between the two cultures. The “buds” could be in reference to the physical setting, culture or young generation who have been destroyed by the fighting.	8) 	“ picasso/mix red an green/is a half caste canvas... tchaikovsky ...mix a black key/wid a white key/is a half caste symphony...” (‘Half-caste’ by John Agard)	Agard uses two of the biggest influencers of European culture, Tchaikovsky and Picasso to indicate the benefits of mixing. He also refrains from following grammatical rules such as using a capital letter at the start of the proper nouns to indicate he does not have to follow proper rules and expectations and is in fact a free individual. The phonetic spelling used ensures we hear the Caribbean accent, an identity Agard puts side-by-side with these European greats to show their equality.
4) 	“It is silent now.” (‘What Were They Like?’ by Denise Levertov)	The poem ends on this short sentence for dramatic impact. Images of light, flowers and music, all qualities that make the Vietnamese culture so rich, have been quashed by the bombings by the American army. In Levertov’s future, Vietnam has been wiped out, a warning that if the fighting doesn’t stop, this could be the future faced.	9) 	“ Yu put me in a pigeon hole ” (‘No Problem’ by Benjamin Zephaniah)	The poet is speaking in an accusatory tone directly to the reader using phonetic spelling, “yu,” to show he is embracing his Jamaican heritage. A “pigeon hole” is overly restrictive: workplaces use them to categorise messages, implying the stereotypes placed on black people are restrictive. “Pigeon holes” are also used for nesting domestic pigeons, possibly a reference to immigrants finding a home in England.
5) 	“Why do you always wince when you hear/ Me say “ Tara ” to me “ Ma ” instead of “Bye Mummy/ dear”? (‘The Class Game’ by Mary Casey)	The second person pronoun indicates that Casey is speaking to middle or/and upper class readers here with an accusatory tone. The juxtaposition in the dialogue contrasts the use of language dependent on class, with colloquial language being used by the working class, but to say the same thing. The use of a rhetorical question queries why the reader may feel uncomfortable with the use of colloquial language which trivialises the differences between the classes.	10) 	“I have no chips on me shoulders ” (‘No Problem’ by Benjamin Zephaniah)	This metaphor is a popular saying meaning someone is holding on to a grudge or grievance or is thinking about themselves too much. The poet is stating that they are not the one holding on to these negative emotions but the white people stereotyping black people are. The tone in which this line is written makes it sound like the speaker is superior, forcing the reader to readdress their judgements.



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