**‘In Mrs Tilscher’s Class’ Textual Analysis Practice**

Over the Easter term the inky tadpoles changed

from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs

hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce

followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking

away from the lunch queue. A rough boy

told you how you were born. You kicked him, but stared

at your parents, appalled, when you got back

home

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.

A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot,

fractious under the heavy, sexy sky. You asked her

how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled

then turned away. Reports were handed out.

You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown

the sky split open into a thunderstorm.

**Textual Analysis Questions**

1. Look at lines 1-5. Explain how the poet makes use of extended metaphor here to explore the idea of change. **4 marks**
2. Look at lines 9-11. How does the poet’s use of language here convey the mood of the pupils at the end of the year? Give two examples and explain. **4 marks**
3. Look at lines 14-15. Explain how the poet’s use of language creates an effective conclusion to the poem. **2 marks**
4. Duffy’s poetry often focuses on feelings of nostalgia. With reference to this poem, and at least one other poem by Duffy, explain how Duffy uses language to explore the feeling of nostalgia. **10 marks**

**20 marks**

**Originally**

We came from our own country in a red room

which fell through the fields, our mother singing

our father’s name to the turn of the wheels.

My brothers cried, one of them bawling, Home,

Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,

the street, the house, the vacant rooms

where we didn’t live any more. I stared

at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,

leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue

where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.

Your accent wrong. Corners, which seem familiar,

leading to unimagined pebble-dashed estates, big boys

eating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.

My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth

in my head. I want our own country, I said.

But then you forget, or don’t recall, or change,

and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only

a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue

shedding its skin like a snake, my voice

in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think

I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space

and the right place? Now, Where do you come from?

strangers ask. Originally? And I hesitate.

**Questions**

1. Explain in detail how a contrast is created between the poet and her brothers in the stanza 1 (lines 4-8).  **4 marks**
2. Look at stanza 2. “All childhood is an emigration”. Explain fully what the poet means by this. **2 marks**
3. In lines 12-16, analyse the use of poetic technique to convey the distress caused to the family members as a result of this new environment. **4 marks**
4. By referring to ‘Originally’ and to at least one other poem by Duffy, discuss how the poet explores the theme of memory. **10 marks**

**20 marks**

**HIGHER**

**The Way My Mother Speaks Textual Analysis Practice**

I say her phrases to myself

in my head

or under the shallows of my breath,

restful shapes moving.

The day and ever. The day and ever.

The train this slow evening

goes down England

browsing for the right sky,

too blue swapped for a cool grey.

For miles I have been saying

What like is it

the way I say things when I think.

Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.

What like is it.

Only tonight

I am happy and sad

like a child

who stood at the end of summer

and dipped a net

in a green, erotic pond. The day

and ever. The day and ever.

I am homesick, free, in love

with the way my mother speaks.

**Textual Analysis Questions**

1. Look at lines 1-4. With close reference to the text, explain how the writer creates a sense of isolation and loneliness in the opening to the poem. **4 marks**
2. Look at lines 13-16. Explain how and why the writer uses contrast to convey her experience moving away from home. **4 marks**
3. Look at lines 16-20. Explain how Duffy’s use of imagery helps to convey her emotional state at this point in the poem.  **2 marks**
4. Duffy often uses first person narration to convey personal experience in her poetry. With reference to this poem, and at least one other poem by Duffy, explain how Duffy uses first person narration to convey a personal experience. **10 marks**

**20 marks**

**‘Mrs Midas’ Textual Analysis**

It was late September. I’d just poured a glass of wine, begun

to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen

filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath

gently blanching the windows. So I opened one,

then with my fingers wiped the other’s glass like a brow.

He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way

the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,

but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked

a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d’Automne –

and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On.

I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?

He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed.

He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of

the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready.

He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.

The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said,

What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.

Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.

He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks.

He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,

a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched

as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees.

After we’d both calmed down, I finished the wine

on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit

on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.

I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.

The toilet I didn’t mind. I couldn’t believe my ears:

how he’d had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.

But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?

It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes

no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced,

as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At least,

I said, you’ll be able to give up smoking for good.

**Textual Analysis Questions**

1. Look at lines 1-12.

By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the poet’s language conveys the contrast in atmosphere between stanza 1 and stanza 2. 4

1. Look at lines 13-24.

Analyse how the poet’s language in these lines creates an unsettling mood. 2

1. Look at lines 25-36.

By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the poet’s language presents the character of Mrs Midas. 4

1. By referring to this poem, and at least ONE other poem by Duffy, discuss how Duffy uses imagery effectively in her poetry. 10

**20 marks**

**War Photographer-Textual Analysis Practice (Higher)**

In his dark room he is finally alone

with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.

The only light is red and softly glows,

as though this were a church and he

a priest preparing to intone a Mass.

Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays

beneath his hands, which did not tremble then

though seem to now. Rural England. Home again

to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,

to fields which don’t explode beneath the feet

of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger’s features

faintly start to twist before his eyes,

a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries

of this man’s wife, how he sought approval

without words to do what someone must

and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black and white

from which his editor will pick out five or six

for Sunday’s supplement. The reader’s eyeballs prick

with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.

From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where

he earns his living and they do not care.

**Textual Analysis Questions**

1. Look at lines 1-6.

Analyse how imagery is used to create a serious atmosphere. 2

1. Look at lines 7-12.

Analyse how Duffy conveys the photographer’s perception of the difference between life in Britain and life in the war zones abroad. 4

1. Look at lines 13-18.

Analyse how the use of poetic techniques conveys the distressing nature of the photographer’s memories. 2

1. Look at lines 19-24.

Analyse how the use of poetic technique highlights the British public’s indifference to the suffering shown in the newspapers they read. 2

1. Referring closely to this poem and to at least one other poem by Duffy, discuss how she explores the link between the past and the present. 10

**20 marks**

**‘Valentine’ Textual Analysis Practice**

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.

It promises light

like the careful undressing of love.

Here.

It will blind you with tears

like a lover.

It will make your reflection

a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.

Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,

possessive and faithful

as we are,

for as long as we are.

Take it.

Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,

if you like.

Lethal.

Its scent will cling to your fingers,

cling to your knife.

**Questions**

1. By referring to the title and lines 1—2, analyse how Duffy creates a dramatic opening to the poem. 2
2. Look at lines 3—17. Analyse how Duffy uses the extended image of “an onion” to suggest both the positive and negative aspects of love. 3
3. Look at lines 18—23. Analyse how Duffy creates a sinister mood in these lines. 3
4. Consider the text as a whole. By referring to the text evaluate how successful the poet has been in conveying the personality of the poem’s speaker. 2
5. By referring to this poem and at least one other poem by Duffy, discuss how the poet takes an interesting stance on the theme of love and relationships. 10

**20 marks**