**Department of English and Literacy**

**Higher Textual Analysis Pack**

**SPARROW**

He’s no artist.

His taste in clothes is more

dowdy than gaudy.

And his nest – that blackbird, writing

pretty scrolls on the air with the gold nib of his beak, 5

would call it a slum.

To stalk solitary on lawns,

to sing solitary in midnight trees,

to glide solitary over grey Atlantics –

not for him: he’d rather 10

a punch-up in a gutter.

He carries what learning he has

lightly – it is, in fact, based only

on the usefulness whose result

is survival. A proletarian bird. 15

No scholar.

But when winter soft-shoes in

and these other birds –

ballet dancers, musicians, architects –

die in the snow 20

and freeze to branches,

watch him happily flying

on the O-levels and A-levels

of the air.

**Norman MacCaig**

**SPARROW – QUESTIONS**

1a.

**Identify** the main purpose of the poem. **Explain** your answer with close reference to the poem. [2]

1b.

Poetry can have many audiences. **Identify** at least one possible audience for this poem and **explain** your answer with close reference to the text. [2]

**Read verse one again.**

2a.

Briefly **summarise** verse one: **using your own words as far as possible**, give three of the ways in which the sparrow is shown to be ordinary in lines 1-6. [3]

2b.

Show how effective you find the language of verse one in establishing a **contrast** between the blackbird and the sparrow. **Comment** on particular words or images. [4]

**Read verse two again.**

3.

**Identify** the characteristic of the sparrow conveyed by the phrase “he’d rather...a punch-up in the gutter.” in lines 10-11? [1]

4a.

The first four lines of this verse present characteristics of different types of birds. **Select** two different examples of poetic technique used to highlight the difference and **analyse** their effect. [2]

4b.

Show how the poet **emphasises** these contrasts. You should consider such features as sentence structure, punctuation, and word choice throughout the second verse.

ANSWERS

**Question 1a (Purpose)**

*In response to Question 1, the candidate should identify and explain the purpose of the poem, including close textual reference.*

**Possible answers include:**

* ideas relating to the ordinary can survive
* ideas relating to survival of the fittest
* ideas relating to the theme of survival

*Appropriate textual reference should be given in the form of direct quotation and/or reference. However, there should be explanation of the evidence and not simply quotation/reference.*

**Possible references include:**

* ‘on the usefulness whose result/is survival’
* ‘die in the snow/and freeze to branches’
* ‘happily flying/on the O-levels and A-levels/of the air’

**Question 1b (Audience)**

*Candidates should correctly identify at least one possible audience.*

**Possible answers include:**

* nature lovers
* people interested in Scottish poetry
* those interested in poems about the power of nature
* those interested in the poetry of MacCaig

*Candidates should support their answer with appropriate textual evidence in the form of direct quotation and/or reference. However, there should be explanation of the evidence and not simply quotation/reference.*

**Possible references include:**

* any reference to nature
* any ref. to the stylistic features of poetry

**Question 2(a)**

* appearance; nest; contrast with the blackbird – all of which shows him to be ordinary.

**Question 2b**

* ‘pretty scrolls … gold nib of his beak’: idea of splendour and out of the ordinary **contrasts** with ‘slum’: negative and unattractive and very ordinary – *two marks for selection and two marks for comment*.

**Question 3**

ordinary; aggressive; rough and ready; unsophisticated.

**Question 4a**

* **parallel structure**: “To stalk/to sing/to glide’ – highlights the beautiful, exotic movement; elegance; aloofness
* **use of the infinitive:** ‘To’ – repetition emphasises the graceful movement
* **word choice/repetition:** ‘solitary’ **–** emphasises they are alone, of a higher order, superior in every way
* **sibilance**: ‘s’ – creates an air of sophistication and superiority
* **climax**: ‘lawns/trees/Atlantics’ – the increasing size and domain indicates their superiority and grandeur

**Question 4(b)**

* **colon**:introduces the contrast
* **dash**: ‘not for him’ – the abruptness emphasises the differences
* **short sentence/positioning**: ‘not for him’ –brevity/placement in line/simple and ordinary language/ hard sounds in contrast to the sibilant soft sounds
* **contraction**: ‘he’d’ **–** informal/colloquial ordinary term contrasts with infinitive
* **word choice**:‘punch up’ – shows violent brawling nature of the sparrow contrasts with ‘stalk/sing/glide’
* **word choice**:‘gutter’ – at the lowest point; can sink no lower contrasts with ‘lawns/trees/Atlantics’

**Question 5**

* attention is drawn to it because it is at the beginning of a line following the enjambement;
* ‘carries’ and ‘lightly’ – carrying something suggests a heavy load but in actual fact he chooses to carry little;
* ‘learning’ and ‘lightly’ – the use of ‘l’ reinforces how little knowledge he has

**Question 6**

* **word choice**: ‘usefulness’
* **word choice**: ‘survival’
* **word choice**: ‘proletarian’
* **minor sentence**: ‘A proletarian bird’
* **minor sentence**: ‘No scholar’ – short, simple, and to the point just like him
* **word choice/positioning**: ‘No’ – once again highlights what he is not, emphasises his ordinariness
* **dash**: before ‘it is, in fact,’ – introduces the explanation as to why he only carries a little learning
* **parenthesis**: ‘in fact’ – reinforces this is a truth about him
* **enjambement** throughout the verse highlights the importance of survival

**Question 7**

* **turning point** of ‘But’ indicates a change of viewpoint
* **personification/alliteration/sibilance**: ‘winter soft-shoes on’ – creates the idea of softness and secrecy
* **word choice/tone**: ‘these other birds’ – suggests a dismissive attitude; creates a condescending tone
* **parenthesis/word choice**: ‘ballet dancers, musicians, architects’ – suggests high-flyers; high achievers; successful professionals
* **word choice**: ‘die’ and ‘freeze’ – harsh use of verbs contrasts with the softness of ‘winter soft-shoes’/‘s’ in verse two
* **word choice**: ‘happily flying’ – he’s happy while the others are frozen solid (literally) – illustrates need to have an instinct for survival; if you don’t have this then you have nothing
* **word choice**: ‘O-levels and A-levels’ – reminds us ‘light learning’ or the ‘usefulness’ of his practical knowledge

**On the Skeleton of a Man by Edward H. Chisnall**

*(found in the chimney of a pawnshop during a demolition in Glasgow, December 1970)*

Decline, it’s the years face turning from one poverty to another.

Damp, and a bitter black bread from countryside shallows.

Today I’ll juggle with my soul again, tramp the long street

The afternoon, and bandy wandering prattle with my shiftless kind.

Two bits of copper, one, and then a hole, a hole – **5**

A place worn thin with constant searching in the emptiness

For crumbs, in the air that warms my belly in the dark.

Today – a walk across the meadow for my lunch,

An acre full of tidy grass. My heels are soaked ragged with the socks hanging

And the lane where that pawnshop stands is hard to walk upon again. **10** – But not yet for the stuff inside – later when the hare is bagged

With heavy breathing, and sighs and dreams are all about,

Then I’ll climb high to the granny on the chimney arch.

Down I’ll go, swift, clever, hunger rumbling in me,

My eyes alert to handholds in the soot. **15**

To drop, to stoop, to slither till my foot

Kicks over bags of silver, ladles full of red gold,

Cambrics, muslin for the fair places, clocks and withering sheets of song.

Up to the neck, the nook of overhanging brick,

Careful, steady now, almost slipped and fell for fifty feet **20**

Upon the slick cobbles, aye, almost tumbled to beat

My brains in on the hard corner of the street.

First one leg, then another, a deep breath, and away…

Down, I’m stuck, damn, my jacket over my head,

Sucking, panting, a faceful of clay – **25**

Whose voice is that? It’s mine! Screaming – shouting –

Lord in Heaven, break my bones, but let me walk again

Outside a standing grave half-way up a chimney’s neck.

I’m stuck and muffled, blind and hot, hungry and afraid,

And down below they cannot hear me as they light the fire. **30**

**On the Skeleton of a Man – Questions**

You will be asked about the poet’s use of language/poetic techniques and might consider: word choice, imagery, tone, syntax, sound, structure…

**1**

Identify one main purpose of the poem. Explain your answer with close reference to the poem.

**2**

Poetry can have many audiences. Identify at least one possible audience for this poem and explain your answer with close reference to the text.

**Read Verse 1 again.**

**3a**

Briefly summarise what kind of man is presented in Verse 1 of the poem, using your own words as far as possible.

**3b**

Identify two different examples of poetic technique used in this section and explain their effect.

**Read Verse 2 again.**

**4a**

Identify what the poet is describing in Verse 2.

**4b**

With close reference to two different poetic techniques, explain how this description is effectively created.

**Read Verse 3 again.**

**5a**

In Verse 3 the poet moves the reader from the man’s thoughts to his actions. Explain clearly what is happening at this point in the poem.

**5b**

With close reference to two examples of sentence structure, explain how the poet creates an effective impression of the man’s actions.

**Read Verse 4 again.**

**6**

With specific reference to two examples of language, explain how effective you find Verse 4 in creating sympathy for the character of the man.

**On The Skeleton of a Man Answer Scheme**

**Question 1 (Purpose)**

*In response to Question 1, pupils should identify and explain the purpose of the poem, including close textual reference.*

**Possible answers include:**

* to consider the extremes people go to when faced with desperate or difficult situations
* to reflect on the effects of poverty
* to give an insight into a person’s predicament

*Appropriate textual reference should be given in the form of direct quotation and/or reference. However, there should be explanation of the evidence and not simply quotation/reference.*

**Question 2 (Audience)**

*Pupils should correctly identify at least one possible audience.*

**Possible answers include:**

* those interested in the history of Glasgow
* those interested in the effects of poverty
* people who are interested in poems which tell a story
* those interested in the poetry of Chisnall

*Pupils should support their answer with appropriate textual evidence in the form of direct quotation and/or reference. However, there should be explanation of the evidence and not simply quotation/reference.*

**Question 3a**

**Possible answers include:**

he is poor; shifty; in a desperate situation; possibly homeless; penniless; hungry; lacking in worthwhile/meaningful human connection; unemployed; morally torn between right and wrong in order to survive

**Question 3b**

* **positioning** of “Decline” and “Damp”: highlight the man’s poor, difficult, unpleasant conditions
* **alliteration**/**sound** in “bitter black bread”: suggests bleakness; harshness; desperation
* **metaphor** of ‘juggle’: conveys the man struggles with his conscience
* **structure**/**repetition** of “Two bits of copper, one, and then a hole, a hole”: illustrates his despair and his actual counting of what little money he has
* **dash**: introduces an explanation of why he has a hole in his pocket
* **word choice** of ‘juggle’; ‘tramp’; ‘bandy’; ‘bandy wandering prattle’; ‘shiftless’: all suggest different aspects about the man’s character

**Question 4a**

**Pupils need both points:**

* he is describing the pawn shop that most of his possessions are in
* **and** visualising his plan to break into it later to steal what he can

**Question 4b**

* **inversion** of ‘Down I’ll go’: the positioning of ‘Down’ emphasises the swiftness of his imagined movement; his descent to hell?
* **word choice** of ‘swift’; ‘clever’; ‘alert’: suggest he is visualising the success of the operation
* **use of the infinitive** in ‘to drop, to stoop, to slither’: describes his actions
* **word choice**/**imagery** in ‘bags of silver’ and/or ‘ladles full of red gold’: suggest riches, wealth, the life he would like to have
* the **listing** of ‘Cambrics, muslin…song’: highlights the finer things in life which he doesn’t have

**Question 5a**

* he has climbed up to the top of the chimney; slips and nearly falls; then climbs over the top of the chimney and drops down inside the chimney

**Question 5b**

* **long sentence** in lines 19-22: describes his thought process/

omission of subject indicates his thought process

* **‘Careful, steady now’**: highlights he is talking to himself and reminding himself he has to take care in this risky operation because he has already ‘slipped’
* ‘First one leg, then another, a deep breath, and away…’ conveys a **listing** of actions/**ellipsis** suggests his descent into the chimney

**Question 6**

* **word choice** of ‘stuck’; ‘sucking’; ‘panting’; ‘screaming’; ‘shouting’; ‘standing grave’: suggest the man’s sense of fear in a dire situation
* **onomatopoeic verbs**/**present participle** in ‘sucking’; ‘panting’ ‘screaming’ and ‘shouting’: illustrate the noise he is making as a result of his terror
* **alliteration** in ‘Down…damn’/‘break my bones’: creates a harsh sound reflecting his horrible predicament
* **word choice**/**imagery** ‘a faceful of clay’: describes him looking directly at the chimney but also references death/idea of being buried
* **rhetorical question** establishes he is alone and has no way out
* **repetition** of ‘and’: highlights the man’s range of emotions and increasing panic building to the realisation that he is facing death
* **positioning** of ‘And’: introduces the end of the build-up to the climax when he realises he is doomed

**Higher Textual Analysis**

**Poetry is a literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and idea by the use of literary techniques, language techniques and a distinctive style.**

**In the Higher course, just like National 5, part of you overall award is given to your textual analysis skills – otherwise know as you Set Text / Scottish Text**

**If you study poetry for your set text, you will study 6 poems of a chosen Scottish Poet and study the themes and commonalities between each text.**

**However, today you are going to brush up on your textual analysis skills by attempting to analyse the poem below**

***Still I Rise by Maya Angelou***

**Before you read over the poem, research the poet in order to help you understand the background, viewpoint and personality of the writer. When studying any text, it is very important you know who your writer is…**

Write a short bio for the poet Maya Angelou

[](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/maya-angelou&psig=AOvVaw3PXQbZfku6a49vBY3iJI4X&ust=1585653890447000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCMiTuZqNwugCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAI)

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.  
  
Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.  
  
Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.  
  
Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.  
  
Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.  
  
You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.  
  
Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?  
  
Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**Textual Analysis…getting started**

1) Who is the speaker of the poem?

2) Who is the audience for the poem?

3) What is the purpose of the poem

4) Who or what is the subject of the poem?

5) What is the tone of the poem? What is the attitude of the poet towards the subject? What are the feelings expressed by the poet about the subject?

6) How is the poem organised? (lines / stanzas etc)

7) What literary and language techniques does the poet use?

8) Is anything repeated in the poem?

9) What feeling do you get from reading the poem?

10) What in this poem did you enjoy or dislike?

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***The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost***

**Before you read over the poem, research the poet in order to help you understand the background, viewpoint and personality of the writer. When studying any text, it is very important you know who your writer is…**

Write a short bio for the poet Robert Frost

[](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https://www.robertfrost.org/&psig=AOvVaw0ZTM_fTr3OndlItoWUMBZN&ust=1585655656720000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCJDH-ueTwugCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD)

**The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

**Textual Analysis…getting started**

1) Who is the speaker of the poem?

2) Who is the audience for the poem?

3) What is the purpose of the poem

4) Who or what is the subject of the poem?

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6) How is the poem organised? (lines / stanzas etc)

7) What literary and language techniques does the poet use?

8) Is anything repeated in the poem?

9) What feeling do you get from reading the poem?

10) What in this poem did you enjoy or dislike?

Twice Shy by Seamus Heaney

Her scarf a la Bardot,

In suede flats for the walk,

She came with me one evening

For air and friendly talk.

We crossed the quiet river,

Took the embankment walk.

Traffic holding its breath,

Sky a tense diaphragm:

Dusk hung like a backcloth

That shook where a swan swam,

Tremulous as a hawk

Hanging deadly, calm.

A vacuum of need

Collapsed each hunting heart

But tremulously we held

As hawk and prey apart,

Preserved classic decorum,

Deployed our talk with art.

Our juvenilia

Had taught us both to wait,

Not to publish feeling

And regret it all too late –

Mushroom loves already

Had puffed and burst in hate.

So, chary and excited,

As a thrush linked on a hawk,

We thrilled to the March twilight

With nervous childish talk:

Still waters running deep

Along the embankment walk.

Notes (Please ignore the numbers)

This poem recalls the early stages of Heaney’s relationship with Marie Devlin - whom he later married - in County Derry, Northern Ireland, during the 1960s. The title comes from the proverb – Once bitten, twice shy.

Twice Shy explores the thrilling tension and conflicting emotions experienced in the early stages of a love relationship. It deals with the almost paradoxical nature of the feelings involved: wariness, nervousness, an uncertainty, but also accompanied by excitement, a sense of thrill and the stir of deep feelings.

The nervousness is born not so much out of fear of expressing love but out of a fear of trusting the feelings, a cynicism born of experience. Perhaps there is a cynical aphorism implicit in the title. But this reservation is balanced by a giddy excitement and imagery suggestive of romantic birdsong. There is also tension between the surface casualness, even falsity, of the conversation and the real and powerful feelings underneath.

The conflict of feelings is encapsulated in the images of falconry. Is there a suggestion here that love is dangerous, that it can mean exposure to pain, indeed be a fatal attraction? Certainly there is a suggestion that love is a primitive instinct and the lover a hunter. The strength, the sheer drawing power of the emotion is obvious: it is a ‘vacuum of need’. So this poem works at the level of feeling, faithfully recording the emotions experienced; but we are also aware of the poet simultaneously analysing and reflecting on such feelings, which gives it a detachment, a perspective – feelings balanced by thought.

Heaney uses imagery from nature – river, birds, and mushrooms – almost in a symbolic way, to convey the complexity of feelings in this poem. ‘Still waters running deep’ suggests powerful hidden currents of human emotion. ‘Mushroom loves’, with their sudden, silent appearance, fragile transitory nature and tendency to sprout in unlikely places, even in poor soil, carries a great deal of comment on immature, adolescent love affairs. Perhaps this is expecting too much from a single image. Is the relevance of the swan to this theme too obvious, with its romantic associations of fidelity, pairing for life, and a bird of calm, and dignified exterior but hidden motions under water?

Perhaps it is worthy looking at the manner in which the hawk image is introduced in the second stanza. In the most unusual simile, dusk is first compared to a backcloth, suggesting that the episode has all the high drama and unreality of a badly staged play. Then this shimmering backdrop takes on the tremulous hovering of a hawk, beautiful but lethal. This startling complexity of image associations has all the cleverness and excitement of a traditional conceit – a metaphorical comparison that appears on first reading to be more startling than accurate. Certainly the imagery here is concentrated and striking, but you must decide for yourself whether you think it apt.

The poem describes two young people approaching love in a shy, tentative way. The would-be lovers are excited, but they are also wary and, ultimately, they fail to overcome the tension they both feel.

The opening lines register the narrator’s attraction to the sophistication and glamour of the young woman. The couple, going out for an evening walk, cross the river. This action suggests a decisive moment in the relationship, a kind of declaration but, by the end of the poem, the couple resemble the river they have crossed. Although the poem deals with the failure of the couple, on this occasion, there is little sense of tragedy. Their failure is simply the failure of two shy youths recalled by the poet in affectionate terms.

In the second stanza, the nervousness and tension between the pair is described indirectly, reflected in the city traffic and the evening sky. The hawk imagery, introduced in this stanza and continued throughout the poem, suggests the excitement, danger and pursuit involved in a relationship. But a hawk symbolises something instinctive, wild and, perhaps, cruel. You might consider, at the end of the poem, if these are the kind of associations that Heaney wants to suggest in describing the beginnings of this relationship.

One of the most interesting phrases in the poem opens the third stanza. Love will rush to fill this vacuum, but the young lovers are not ready to open themselves to it.

The fourth stanza provides the explanation for this hesitancy. Previous declarations of love had ended unhappily. Therefore, they proceed cautiously, connected to each other, excited by the connection but still wary. And the reader recognises that the failure to speak their feelings is less important than the recognition of the deep but unspoken love between them. There is much to admire in the poem. The short lines catch the nervousness of the couple, and the close rhymes create a sense of tautness.

The tautness is further emphasised, in the first two stanzas, by the use of harsh final-consonant sounds in a succession of words: walk, talk, took, traffic, dusk, and hawk. In the metaphor ‘Mushroom loves already/Had puffed and burst in hate’, the reader can see the range of meanings and associations in the use of the word ‘mushroom’ to describe adolescent love. It is a love that can be sudden, unlikely and short-lived. The verbs ‘puffed’ and ‘burst’ suggest that it may also be unpleasant or ulcerous, exploding, like the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb, in hate. The question is whether the image is being asked to do too much. Is it overworked or overloaded? How far does it take us from the young boy and girl in the poem? Too far, perhaps.

The same might be said of the simile that compares the dusk to a backcloth against which the drama of the lovers’ story will be played. This is clear enough. But then the movement of the backcloth is compared to the movement of a hawk. Is this illuminating or is it an unnecessary complication? Is this image overworked?

Questions (Again, please ignore the numbers on the far left)

1/

What is your understanding of the plot of the poem?

2/

List the themes contained in the poem – support your answer with evidence.

3/

There are conflicting emotions present in the poem.

Identify these emotions and quote as evidence.

4/

Nature plays an important part in this poem.

Comment on the reason for this.

5/

List the references to nature contained in the poem and comment on their effectiveness.

6/

How does Heaney seem to view love in this poem?

Explain your answer as clearly as you can.

7/

How is tension conveyed in the poem?

Comment on specific examples in the poem.

8/

The couple do not seem relaxed in each other’s company yet.

Find evidence to support this – comment on the effectiveness of this evidence.

9/

How does Heaney make us aware that he has been hurt by love before?

10/

The poem ends on a positive note.

Comment on how Heaney has managed to convey this tone.