



# EDWIN MORGAN

## STUDY PACK

Use this to help prepare for the context questions in the  
National 5 Critical Reading paper.

### ABSTRACT

This pack contains annotated poems,  
revision tasks and practise questions.

### Ms Kirkwood

National 5 English: Critical Reading Paper

TRIO

- Group of 3 pupil that are connected/in harmony.
- 3 Kings/wise men in the Christmas story

Present tense and realism – makes it more realistic and vivid as it is like we are watching it happened too

Coming up Buchanan Street, quickly, on a sharp winter evening

- 'Sharp' – negative connotations. The speaker is feeling 'cold' both externally and internally.
- Morgan gives us the time of day and year to help set the scene.

a young man and two girls, under the Christmas lights-

The young man carries a new guitar in his arms.

- Makes us think of 3 kings following a star or presents under a tree. This suggests that the trio are like a present to the speaker bringing the gift of joy and happiness.
- The dash is the start of parenthesis

Repetition of 'carries' shows that all of these objects are being protected and cared for by their owners. They show a contrast with the 'cold' gifts given by the 3 kings.

the girl on the inside carries a very young baby.

and the girl on the outside carries a Chihuahua.

And the three of them are laughing, their breath rises

in a cloud of happiness, and as they pass

'are laughing' → present tense which shows it's happening in the moment. Makes it more realistic and vivid.  
Metaphor - "cloud" = togetherness, the trio's breath joins together  
Warmth of their breath compared to cold air makes a literal cloud but metaphorically the cloud shows us the warmth and bond of friendship between them.  
Creates a 'heavenly', 'angelic' image

the boy says, "Wait till he sees this but!"

Colloquial/informal – a contrast to the previous image and shows that they are just ordinary people – these are not 'kings'

The Chihuahua has a tiny Royal Stewart tartan coat like a tea pot-holder.

the baby in its white shawl is all bright eyes and mouth like

- Link to baby Jesus and the nativity  
- 'white' has connotations of innocence  
- 'bright' = alert, interested, excited by the world  
- Simile = "fresh" and "sweet" positive connotations, "favour" normally associated with a gift hidden in a cake – shows the baby is giving gift of joy.

Chihuahua = mix of Scottish and foreign as Scottish coat but Mexican dog. Suggestion that Scotland a place where foreigners can become part of our nation?  
Simile – reminds us of warmth or silly/funny image

favours in a fresh sweet cake,

the guitar swells out under its milky plastic cover, tied at the neck

'swells' and 'milky' have connections to the idea of pregnancy. Shows the guitar is capable of producing as joy and happiness through music.

with silver tinsel tape and a brisk sprig of mistletoe.

Orphean sprig! Melting baby! Warm Chihuahua!

The vale of tears is powerless before you.

- Allusion to Orpheus (Greek) – talented and could charm all living things, saved his lover from Hades and the Underworld by getting her to follow his music. Allusion suggests that music is powerful. --  
Repeated use of exclamation marks-like Morgan is shouting with joy, optimism

'silver' – connotations of precious.  
'mistletoe' – connotations of love and romance. Line structure mimics the function of mistletoe

Whether Christ is born, or is not born, you

put paid to fate, it abdicates

Doubt over what to believe – Morgan is suggesting that the joy and happiness that celebration brings is more important. This is similar to *Good Friday*.

under the Christmas lights.

Allusion to a hymn, troubles and problems are simply a part of life. Morgan suggesting that the three objects mentioned have the power to lift us out of such sadness.

Monsters of the year

go blank, are scattered back,

can't bear this march of three.

'abdicates' - Word choice and position. Associated with royalty giving up power. Suggestion is that fate has decided to give up in the face of these three objects.

Consider line layout –and how it emphasises the meaning of the word 'abdicates'

-And the three have passed, vanished in the crowd

(yet not vanished, for their arms they wind

'monsters of the year' - Metaphor for the cruelties in life – the love and happiness of the trio will defeat all of these.

the life of men and beasts, and music,

laughter ringing them round like a guard)

Suddenly the moment is over, but it still has a lasting effect on the narrator.

at the end of this winter's day.

Simile shows that the ordinary aspects of life – human joy and laughter – is just as important as any religious significance at Christmas

End of parenthesis. The dashes enclose the whole encounter which could indicate protection of the trio. It could also indicate that this is a brief 'extra' moment which is still important to him.

Morgan's final message – love human life is special and sacred, with or without religion.

The Friday before Easter Sunday, and the day on which Jesus was crucified and died.

## GOOD FRIDAY

The time Jesus was said to have died

Three o'clock. The bus lurches

Word choice – 'lurches' - The bus is changing gears/turning a corner. It moves in a sudden, jerky way which is similar way to the inebriated man.

'flops' – word choice – shows lack of control/ungainly

round into the sun. 'D's this go –'

Enjambment: mimics the movement of the bus – your eyes lurch between the lines in the same way the bus moves around the corner.

he flops beside me – 'right along Bath Street?

Dash shows narrator's missing speech – his voice is not important → the focus is the 'working man'

- Oh tha's, tha's all right, see I've

got to get some Easter eggs for the kiddies.

Use of Glaswegian/Scots helps to set the scene. In addition, it shows his speech is slurred (D's instead of Does).

I've had a wee drink, ye understand –

ye'll maybe think it's a – funny day

to be celebrating – well, no, but ye see

The dash shows that the flow of conversation is interrupted, either because of the movement of the bus, or the concentration of trying to sit down

Dashes in his speech:

- Pauses/hesitation
- Natural speech pattern
- More realistic – the reader can 'hear' him
- Shows he is losing train of thought.

Justifying himself – he's anxious about the way that he's seen

I wasny working, and I like to celebrate

when I'm no working – I don't say it's right

I'm no saying it's right, ye understand - ye understand?

Repetition – reinforces his insecurity and desire to be understood.

Non-standard spelling and grammar → 'hear' his Glaswegian accent which makes the character more realistic and vivid.

But anyway tha's the way I look at it -

I'm no boring you, eh? – ye see today

take today, I don't know what today's in aid of,

whether Christ was – crucified or was he –

He doesn't need to know in order to celebrate. Similar to 'Trio'. The joy and happiness that the day brings is more important.

rose fae the dead like, see what I mean?

You're an educatit man, you can tell me -

- Aye, well. There ye are. It's been seen

time and again, the working man

has nae education, he jist canny – jist

hasny got it, know what I mean

Key theme:

- Attitudes towards the working class
- He undermines himself
- Morgan is critical of this attitude towards the 'working man'

The man is unsteady and unpredictable → his movements mirror the unpredictable way he was speaking.

he's jist bliddy ignorant – Christ aye,

bliddy ignorant. Well – 'The bus brakes violently,

Abrupt and sudden movement of the bus mirrors the abrupt and sudden end to the conversation.

he lunges for the stair, swings down – off,

into the sun for his Easter eggs,

on very

nearly

steady

legs.

'very nearly' → his legs are not steady.

The structure mimics the man's movements helping to make the character more realistic and vivid.

Ends on a light-hearted/humorous tone.

## In the Snack Bar by Edwin Morgan

At the beginning the man is feared by the onlookers in the café.

Alliteration creates a harsh sound

Snake like associations, continues the ominous atmosphere

Lots of people would be aware of the old man, but only a 'few' look up when they hear the sound that suggests he needs help

1 A cup capsizes along the formica,  
slithering with a dull clatter.

A few heads turn in the crowded evening, snack-bar.

Suggests a real effort, almost mechanical

5. An old man is trying to get to his feet  
from the low round stool fixed to the floor.

Slowly he levers himself up, his hands have no power.

Transferred epithet – it is really the man who is 'dismal' and he is made that way because of his hump

He is up as far as he can get. The dismal hump

Personification – makes the hump seem like an evil thing to be feared

looming over him forces his head down.

Simile- trapped, frustrated, angered, distressed and others are frightened of him

He stands in his stained beltless gabardine  
like a monstrous animal caught in a tent

Jacket with no belt – shows that he is not well cared for

in some story. He sways slightly,

his face not seen, bent down

in shadow under his cap.

They can't see him, creates a sense of mystery, uncertainty, connotations of darkness and evil. It also dehumanises the man as his face - the thing we most easily relate to – is hidden and nothing more than 'shadow'.

Even on his feet he is staring at the floor

15. or would be, if he could see.

2. Start to feel sympathy for the old man

I notice now his stick, once painted white  
but scuffed and muddy, hanging from his right arm.

Conveys his blindness but also that he ventures out a lot.

Long blind, hunchback born, half paralysed

The list of his ailments creates an impact as it is climactic – used for emphasis

he stands

20. fumbling with his stick

and speaks:

'I want - to go to the - toilet.'

The dashes are used to emphasise his stutter/nervousness/dependency on others emphasis

It is down two flights of stairs, but we go.

I take his arm. 'Give me - your arm - it's better.' he says.

Dashes used to emphasise his stutter/nervousness/ dependency on others emphasis

25. Inch by inch we drift towards the stairs.

Repetition- shows how slowly they are moving

'drift', suggests a lack of purpose

A few yards of floor are like a landscape

to be negotiated, in the slow setting out

time has almost stopped. I concentrate

my life to his: crunch of spilt sugar,

slidy puddle from the night's umbrellas,

Simile – multiple obstacles, terrains, to be traversed; highlights how everyday experiences are so challenging for him

Hyperbole, or metaphor, emphasises how long everything is taking to complete

table edges, people's feet,  
hiss of the coffee-machine, voices and laughter,  
smell of a cigar, hamburgers, wet coats steaming,  
and the slow dangerous inches to the stairs.

Structural – list, emphasising how lots of everyday activities prove to be obstacles and challenging

Alliteration and onomatopoeia being used to create a sinister feel for the snack bar

35. I put his right hand on the rail  
and take his stick. He clings to me. The stick  
is in his left hand, probing the treads.

Highlights how desperate and dependant the man is on the help of people he does not know. The short sentence emphasises his desperation

Repetition – emphasises the time that it takes to make the journey down the stairs, but also mimics the repetitive motion of climbing stairs

I guide his arm and tell him the steps.

And slowly we go down. And slowly we go down

White tiles and mirrors at last. He shambles

uncouth into the clinical gleam.

Word choice highlights the contrast between the white toilet and the dark old man, makes him seem sinister again – connotations of black and white

I set him in position, stand behind him  
and wait with his stick.

Onomatopoeia, highlights the actual sound of him going to the toilet, pathetic defenceless and generates pity

His brooding reflection darkens the mirror

but the trickle of his water is thin and slow,

an old man's apology for living.

Metaphorical, conveys how pathetic the state of his life is- can't even go to the toilet properly or by himself

Painful ages to close his trousers and coat -

I do up the last buttons for him.

He asks doubtfully, 'Can I - wash my hands?'

Dashes– suggest has not been allowed to do so before, suggests he is a burden

I fill the basin, clasp his soft fingers round the soap.

He washes feebly, patiently. There is no towel.

I press the pedal of the drier, draw his hands

gently into the roar of the hot air.

But he cannot rub them together,

drags out a handkerchief to finish.

He is glad to leave the contraption, and face the stairs.

He climbs, and steadily enough.

He climbs, we climb. He climbs

with many pauses but with that one

persisting patience of the undefeated

which is the nature of man when all is said.

And slowly we go up. And slowly we go up.

Alliteration, emphasises his endless determination through the repeated sounds

The words also highlight his determination to live life, regardless of the length of time that everyday tasks take to complete

Survival is the most important thing – you should never be 'defeated' by life.

The faltering, unfaltering steps

take him at last to the door

Contrasting words – shows that the old man is weak but 'unfaltering' shows he is determined. - emphasises the scale of the task for the old man.

65. across that endless, yet not endless waste of floor.

It is taking so long that it uncomfortable, connotations of pain - hyperbole

Connotations of climb, positive, going up- hopeful, but also hard work.

Sentence structure, repetition, emphasises the points above

Repetition emphasises the length of time

I watch him helped on a bus. It shudders off in the rain.

Personification - The bus, like the man, is unsteady.

The conductor bends to hear where he wants to go.

He needs to do this to survive, but it is difficult to do and the narrator and the reader pity him.

Wherever he could go it would be dark and yet he must trust men.

Literally – he can't see, therefore 'dark'  
Metaphorically – his life is difficult and a struggle.

Without embarrassment or shame

he must announce his most pitiful needs in a public place. No one sees his face.

He is ignored and people only see his disability rather than the man – makes us feel pity and guilt.

Simile – Just as wet leaves are fragile, useless and weak, so his hands are powerless and clinging to the stick.

Does he know how frightening he is in his strangeness under his mountainous coat, his hands like wet leaves stuck to the half-white stick?

Theme:

- Poor treatment of the disabled
- Human fear of things that are different.

His life depends on many who would evade him.

But he cannot reckon up the chances,

having one thing to do,

Transferred epithet  
- he is blind, not his 'hump'.

to haul his blind hump through these rains of August.

Theme:

- The plight of the disabled – he has to have complete trust in people who avoid him and are frightened of him and he has no choice.

80.

Dear Christ, to be born for this!

Theme:

- The world is unfair
- Human endurance – suffering and the nature of it
- Raises the question – why do people have to suffer?
- Makes the reader reflect on the difficulties faced by the disabled.

Rains – emphasises the dark and depressing mood.

## Winter

Repetition of 'goes' and 'gone' – reinforces the idea of the passing of time. Negative verbs. Note: present tense!

Deterioration and death are two prominent ideas in the opening line of the poem. 'Decay' and 'dies' contribute to an idea of aging and, eventually, passing away.

More negative verbs

The year **goes**, the woods **decay**, and after,

many a summer **dies**. **The swan**

on Bingham's pond, **a ghost**, comes and **goes**.

Metaphor – links with this idea of life ebbing away. Usually a swan is a beautiful creature, but here it is haunting = dark imagery.

It **goes**, and ice appears, it holds,

bears gulls that stand around surprised,

blinking in the **heavy light**, bears boys

Oxymoron – a figure of speech when two words that contradict each other are used together. It's a good description of the quality of daylight you can see in winter, when the sky seems low and brooding – feels unsettling

when skates take over swan-tracks **gone**.

After many summer dyes, **the swan-white ice**

There seems to be a contradiction in the way the ice is pictured here. In line 8 it is said to be 'swan-white' but in line 9 it 'glints only crystal beyond white'. The colour has gone. It is as if Morgan creates that first, positive colour, then pulls back from it again.

**glints only crystal beyond white**. Even

**dearest blue's not there, though poets would find it.**

He is a poet, however, and even he can't find it. It's as if the winter is so bleak that it has depressed him and drained the poetry out of him.

I find one **stark** scene

**cut** by evening **cries**, by **warring** air.

Word choice – negative connotations of violence and conflict

The muffled hiss of blades escapes into breath,

hangs with it a moment, **fades** off.

More repetition of negative verbs associated with death and the passing of time (fades)

**Fades** off, goes, the scene, **the voices fade**,

This is the point where humanity leaves the poem. First the 'voices fade' in line 15 as the boys seem to skate further away....then disappear.

the line of trees, the woods that fall, decay

and break, the dark comes down, **the shouts**

This poem has had a swan, some gulls, and a group of skating boys, but they are all gone now. Only the woods are left but even they are decaying.

**run off into it and disappear.**

**At last the lamps go too**, when fog

Even artificial, human attempts at creating light have been defeated

**drives monstrous** down the dual carriageway

Light, which is always a metaphor for something positive, has gone. In its place we have another metaphor - 'monstrous' fog.

out to the west, and even in my room

The poem is now leaving the world of nature.

and on this paper I do not know

about that grey dead pane

of ice that sees nothing and that nothing sees.

The ending is very nihilistic. This means that it is bleak, that it is interested in nothingness (we see the word 'nothing' repeated within the final line.)

'sees nothing' can be interpreted as the idea that no-one will ever see death coming

'nothing sees' can be interpreted as the idea that death does not care who it comes for – it takes life away without caring or thinking about who it is taking.

Edwin Morgan



## Part One of Critical Reading: Questions on Poetry:

Questions on the given poem:

Use the following formula when asked to analyse any techniques in the poem:

- Identify technique and quote } 

Worth one mark
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- This suggests....
- This is effective because... } 

Worth one mark
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*For example (the following question is on 'Trio'):*

### **Questions**

1. Explain **one** way in which the first 2 lines provide an effective opening to the poem. (2)
  - *The poet uses word choice and setting in the opening line "sharp winter evening".*
  - *The word 'sharp' suggests that it is painfully cold and gives the reader the time of day and year in which this scene is taking place.*
  - *This is effective because it creates an image of the coldness as being aggressive; it also gives the indication that the narrator feels negative - he is internally, as well as externally, cold. This helps the reader understand the conditions and mood of the poem at the start - it is more realistic and vivid for us.*

One of the questions may also ask you to **summarise** what happens in the poem or in certain lines. This must be done **in your own words**.

The last question:

1.
  - Identify which poems you will be comparing and say what they have in common.
  - Comment on this commonality
2. From the given poem (the one that the other 4 questions were on):
  - Identify technique and quote it
  - This suggests.../ This emphasises....
  - This is effective because...(this must link to the question)
3. From another poem
  - Identify technique and quote it
  - This suggests.../ This emphasises....
  - This is effective because...(this must link to the question)
4. From another poem
  - Identify technique and quote it
  - This suggests.../ This emphasises....
  - This is effective because...(this must link to the question)

## Worked Comparison Question

*'In the Snack Bar' explores important social issues. With close textual reference, discuss in what ways this poem is similar to another poem or poems by Morgan you have studied. You may refer to ideas and/or language in your answer.*

**Step 1: Mention the specific area of commonality and include what poem(s) you will be discussing. (2 marks)**

- 'In the Snack Bar' and 'Good Friday' by Edwin Morgan are both poems which explore the lack of concern society has for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.
- 'In the Snack Bar' follows a severely disabled man in his attempt to navigate a Glaswegian snack bar, ignored by most around him. 'Good Friday' shows the lack of assurance even the narrator can give a man as he drunkenly asks about the nature of religion during Easter.

**Step 2: Make a specific reference to the poem in front of you (quote) and link to the question – mention techniques and effect. (2 marks)**

- In 'In the Snack Bar' Morgan portrays the infirm man who is mostly ignored by those around him. Only "a few heads turn" when the man knocks over a cup in his efforts to stand up. Here, Morgan's use of the contrast of the word "few" in the "crowded" snack bar **suggests** the lack of notice or care the customers have for the man, even in his "long blind, hunchback born, half-paralysed" state. **This is effective because** Morgan draws our attention to with his list of the man's ailments later in the poem, clearly indicating how vulnerable and weak this man is.

**Step 3: Make a reference to another poem and link to the question – again, mention techniques and their effect. (2 marks)**

- In 'Good Friday', the man who "flops" down beside our narrator is also vulnerable, in the sense that he is drunk during the day ("3pm") and is self-conscious over his lack of education ("he's jist bliddy ignorant"). The repetition used in some of his questions, such as "ye understand – ye understand?" **emphasises** his need for understanding and acceptance from this stranger on a bus. Morgan also uses parenthesis here to break up this line, indicating the man's broken language due to his drunken state. **This is effective because** it helps the reader to infer that the narrator, and others he may address, have not given him the reassurance that he needs.

**Step 4: Make a reference to another poem and link to the question – again, mention techniques and their effect. (2 marks)**

- Despite repeated questions from the man, such as "I'm no boring you, eh?" and "see what I mean?", the narrator never appears to reply to him – unlike the narrator who actively helps the old man in 'In the Snack Bar'. The constant questions **emphasise** the man's need for reassurance, but in providing no response, Morgan **effectively** highlights how society is willing to ignore the desire

## Now You Try – *In the Snack Bar* and *Trio*

- 'In the Snack Bar' and 'Trio' are both poems that establish use techniques effectively to create setting, capture a moments in the present tense and involve a journey of the poem.
- 'In the Snack Bar' takes place in a crowded café, as an old, disabled man attempts to make his way to the downstairs toilet, amidst the ignorance of those around him. Moran uses this incident to make a comment on the apathy of society in relation to the vulnerable.
- 'Trio' observes the journey of three friends travelling through Buchanan Street at Christmas time under the Christmas lights, as they are observed by an unknown narrator who takes joy from the event.
- Both 'In the Snack Bar' and 'Trio' have a sense of immediacy through use of the present tense.
- *In the Snack Bar*: "A **cup capsizes along the formica**" suggests that the falling cup seem more urgent and allows the reader to feel involved in the action. The use of alliteration here helps us to picture the cup rolling and we can almost hear the hard 'c' sound, which grabs the reader's attention. "Capsizes" make the action seem quite dramatic, although ironically nobody seems to care. This is effective as it represents the lack of care that society has for what is happening around them, which is the point Morgan is making.
- Similarly, in *Trio*: "**Coming up Buchanan St**" makes the reader seem involved as you feel as though you are there witnessing the bustling city centre crowds. We can relate to the setting as it is a well-known, commercial street. The inverted word order places emphasis on 'coming up' depicting the action first and giving the sense that the trio are moving up through the street. This is effective as it shows they are excited to be in this setting, as reinforced by the adverb 'quickly'.

**Now you finish off this answer to get the full 8 marks.**

**Another example:**

Choose another poem by Morgan which, in your opinion, opens in an effective way.

**Referring closely to the opening lines of the poem and the poetic techniques employed, show how Morgan's openings provide a good introduction to his poems. (8)**

- In both "Trio" and "Good Friday" Morgan's use of present tense, sound techniques and clearly establishing setting makes the opening realistic and effective because the reader is able to relate to the scene and picture it more clearly.
- The opening of "Trio" is effective as the reader is given a clear time setting and is given a sense of the atmosphere: "sharp winter evening". This suggests that it is painfully cold and the reader is given a clear indication of the time of year and day. This is effective because the word 'sharp' has many negative connotations and not only does the reader understand that it is incredibly and uncomfortably cold, it also helps them to understand the emotions of the narrator – he is feeling cold both externally and internally and this effectively sets up the change that he will go through upon seeing the trio. The fact that it is "winter evening" is also effective as it helps to establish the setting and allows the reader to fully picture the scene.
- The opening of "Good Friday" is also effective as Morgan uses word choice and enjambment to create a more realistic and vivid scene and to involve the reader in the poem: "the bus lurches/round into the sun". This suggests that the bus is making a sudden, jerky movement as it turns the corner. This is effective because the reader can relate this movement to the drunk man who has got on the bus; similar to the jerky movements of the vehicle, the man is unsteady on his feet. The enjambment helps to make this even more vivid and realistic as it mimics the movement of the bus – the reader's eye 'lurches' between the lines in the same way that the bus moves round the corner. This helps the reader better understand the character of the 'working man' and involves them more deeply in the poem.
- "Good Friday" also makes use of Glaswegian dialect and dashes to create a vivid image of the central character of the poem: "D's this go – /he flops beside me – 'right along Bath Street?'" This suggests that the man is Glaswegian, is slurring his speech and helps give a clearer sense of his movements. This is effective because the shortened 'D's' rather than 'Does' helps to set the scene in terms of setting – it is clearly a Scottish character – and shows that the man's speech is slurred. This helps to give the reader a clearer image of the character and shows that he has been drinking or celebrating. The dashes help to create realistic dialogue as they create natural pauses in the speech. The reader is left wondering if the man is interrupting the flow of his conversation because of the movement of the bus, or because of the concentration of trying to sit down. This helps to create a more realistic character that the reader can relate to.