

GCSE (9–1)

ENGLISH LITERATURE

J352/02: Poetry across time
Conflict cluster

Teacher Guide



RUNNYMEDE

Lit in colour

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Lit in Colour

Lit in Colour partnership

OCR is a named partner for the Lit in Colour project. Lit in Colour was created by Penguin Books UK and [The Runnymede Trust](#), to support UK schools to make the teaching and learning of English literature more inclusive of writers of colour. The campaign published research in 2021 which investigated the barriers to inclusivity schools in England currently face.

Our involvement provides us with additional expertise and support as we diversify our own Literature qualifications.

The research led nature of this work gives us access to a comprehensive view of what teachers and students might want from us as an awarding body.

Through our work with Lit in Colour, we are able to offer a wider range of high quality learning and teaching resources. Our new GCSE and A Level texts are not just accessible but exciting, challenging and enriching learning opportunities for our teachers and students.

Introduction

Changes to the 'Conflict' cluster

OCR is committed to improving the diversity of English Literature texts studied at GCSE. Schools and colleges, stakeholders and external experts have been consulted and we have decided to refresh the Poetry Anthology 'Towards a World Unknown'.

Unlike other parts of the specification, the selection of poetry for study and for unseen assessment can go beyond 'literature of the British Isles', although poems must have been originally written in English. There also needs to be a 'representative

selection of Romantic poems' within each cluster. The initial anthology included Romantic poetry by women, and a diverse range of modern poets, but we are pleased to be extending that diversity further by a selection of five new poems from contemporary and established poets of colour. These five new poems will replace some Victorian and Twentieth-century poems which have either become over-familiar through the assessment process, or which have proved to have unexpected difficulties or seemed less accessible for students.

Summary of the changes

Previous anthology poems	New anthology poems
'A Poison Tree', William Blake	'Colonization in Reverse', Louise Bennett
'The Man He Killed', Thomas Hardy	'Papa- T', Fred D'Aguiar
'Anthem For Doomed Youth', Wilfred Owen	'We Lived Happily during the War', Ilya Kaminsky
'Punishment', Seamus Heaney	'Thirteen', Caleb Femi
'Phrase Book', Jo Shapcott	'Songs for the People', Frances E. W. Harper

'Colonization in Reverse' by Louise Bennett (1919-2006)

The poet

Louise Bennett was a highly influential Jamaican poet and performer, committed to using dialect – Jamaican Creole – in her writing. Jamaican patois is now called 'Nation Language', and Bennett's writing contributing to Jamaica's sense of itself as a nation. She began writing and performing poems as a teenager and performed and acted in London as well as Jamaica. She lectured in Drama and Folklore at the University of the West Indies. Her poetic persona was 'Miss Lou' and she released many recordings of her poems, stories and folklore collections. She could communicate with any audience, Jamaican or non-Creole, and her work was both popular and the subject of academic study. In an interview she said 'I have found a medium through which I pretend to be laughing. Most of the time when we laugh it is so that we may not weep... the nature of the Jamaican dialogue is the nature of comedy' (Interview with Dennis Scott).

The poem

'Colonization in Reverse' is an ironic comment on the Windrush generation who arrived in Britain from Caribbean countries from 1948 onwards during a period when the post-war UK government encouraged migration to address a shortage of workers. As these countries were then part of the British Empire, these migrants held British citizenship and had a right to live and work permanently in the UK. Bennett turns this into a comic reversal of the process of colonisation which led the British and others to claim the West Indian islands and settle an African slave population to work the plantations. She celebrates this irony, and the way history has been turned around by the arrival of large numbers of Jamaicans in England. Patois and rhyme are used to give the poem an upbeat and joyful tone, appropriate to the 'calypso culture' of the 1950s but there is a hint of concern for the future in the final lines. Bennett asks readers to consider the history and culture of Caribbean migrants and to understand their motivation in settling in the 'motherlan'. Past and future conflicts are alluded to, but she celebrates the way the Jamaican migrants 'tun history upside dung'.

Responding to the poem

The poetry section of the exam assesses AO1 and AO2.

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts: maintain a critical style; develop an informed personal response; use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant terminology where appropriate.

Questions to ask about 'Colonization in Reverse'

1. 'Miss Lou' is speaking to 'Miss Mattie': how does this use of persona affect the way we read the poem? (AO1)
2. What is the irony of calling England '*de motherlan*'? (AO1)
3. There is a historical allusion to '*bag an baggage*': how else does Bennett hint at the legacy of empire? (AO1)
4. Why might the reference to 'loyalty' in stanza 5 be ironic? (AO1)
5. What else does 'Miss Lou' find comic about the migrant's behaviour? (AO1)
6. The language and tone make fun of the situation, but how does the writer hint at potential conflicts between the migrants and the English? (AO1/AO2)
7. How does Bennett's language present the funny side of migration? (AO2)
8. Which aspects of structure and form are traditional and which are popular? (AO2)
9. What is the rhetorical effect of the pairs in the second stanza? (AO2)
10. What is the effect of the exclamations in stanza four and who do they refer to? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Envy' – contrasting cultures and how they might clash
- 'Boat Stealing' – how potentially comic situations might also have a serious aspect
- 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' – fighting back against imperial power
- 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' – marking and celebrating difference
- 'Vergissmeinnicht' – reversals of fate and fortune
- 'What Were They Like?' – conflicts succeeding the end of the empire
- 'Lament' – migration and the consequences of war
- 'Flag' – questions of identity and loyalty
- 'Honour Killing' – conflicts caused by 'new geography'
- 'Partition' – postcolonial guilt and exploitation
- 'Papa-T' - West Indian relationship with the 'motherland'
- 'We Lived Happily during the War' – use of irony; attempts to ignore conflict
- 'Thirteen' – the experiences of Black lives in UK
- 'Songs for the People' - celebrating diversity through rhyming quatrains

Explore different attitudes to the legacy of colonialism and empire, and how this has shaped post-war conflicts and questions of identity.

Links for further research

Here is a [homage to Louise Bennett's life and works](#)

The [British Library](#) has many resources about the Windrush generation.

There are a lot of videos of Louise Bennett performing, and here is [an interview where she compares her poetry to modern 'dub' poets](#).

In this article, [contemporary poets talk about the influence of the older generation of Caribbean poets](#), such as Louise Bennett: Jamaican poet and performer Valerie Bloom [reads the poem on Wasafiri](#).

'Papa-T' by Fred D'Aguiar (b. 1960)

The poet

Fred D'Aguiar was born in London but initially brought up by his grandmother in Guyana. His first poetry collection gave voice to 'Mama Dot', a typical grandmother-figure, and brought together English and Nation Language or Guyanese Creole. He has also given voice to the West Indian diaspora in London, while dramatising stories about the history of slavery and exploitation in Guyana. He has also written novels and plays for stage and radio, while teaching creative writing in the UK and USA. He is an accomplished technician and can write in a wide range of forms and styles.

The poem

This poem is an example of intertextuality. 'Papa-T' is the poet's nickname for both his grandfather and Victorian Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson. It's addressed to the poet's grandfather and he remembers him reciting aloud Tennyson's famous 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', although the landscape of this poem of Victorian imperial warfare is confused with that of the Guyanese jungle. It's an affectionate memory in contrast to the conflict Tennyson describes, with cavalrymen 'stormed at with shock and shell'. Here it is the poet's grandfather who is storming in his 'no-nonsense recitals' and says that if the children don't pay him attention he will give them a 'good lickin' and send them to bed. The poet compares past conflicts and family history to show how other cultures have their own version of the poetic tradition of writing about the imperial past. For the poet, startled at first by the blank page when he starts to write, the memory of his grandfather's recitals is an inspiration. However, unlike Tennyson's soldiers he does not simply 'do and die', following orders. For him, 'to hear' is 'to disobey' and Tennyson's poem is subverted by 'that tongue', the echo of his grandfather's dialect and accent.

Responding to the poem

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AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts: maintain a critical style; develop an informed personal response; use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant terminology where appropriate.

Questions to ask about 'Papa-T'

1. Why does the poet as a young boy see men '*tin-soldiering*' the action in Tennyson's poem? (AO1)
2. How does this intertextual relationship between the poems make us think about different cultures and their shared traditions? (AO1)
3. Why does the poet call his grandfather '*our sweet seasalter*' and how do the grandfather's stories influence the imagery describing his recital? (AO1)
4. Why is the mistake in the third stanza a further allusion to Tennyson? (AO1)
5. How does the poet's imagery evoke his home in Guyana? (AO1/AO2)
6. How does the '*tongue*' of the grandfather's recital contrast with the voice he uses when shouting at the children? (AO1/AO2)
7. What is surprising about the last word of the poem? (AO1/AO2)
8. How are the historical sights and sounds of battle evoked in the first stanza? (AO2)
9. Why do you think D'Aguiar, unlike Tennyson, does not use rhyme? (AO2)
10. How does the poet exaggerate the effects of his grandfather's recital of the poem in stanza two? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Envy' – Victorian values and conflicts
- 'Boat Stealing' – the influence of childhood experiences
- 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' – what we learn from the recital of old stories of conflict
- 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' – rebellion against conventional views
- 'Vergissmeinnicht' – family responses to conflict and tragedy
- 'What Were They Like?' – trying to remember good times and bad in the past
- 'Lament' – memories of historical conflicts and what they teach us
- 'Flag' – West Indian responses to patriotism and imperial conflict
- 'Honour Killing' – changing attitudes to 'honour'
- 'Partition' – older generations and memories of conflict
- 'Colonization in Reverse' – seizing control of history and its conflicts
- 'We Lived Happily during the War' – stories of the past and what they tell us
- 'Thirteen' – inclusion and the excluded
- 'Songs for the People' – celebrating diversity through rhyming quatrains

Links for further research

Read an [interview with D'Aguiar](#).

Read about the [range of his writing on the British Council website](#).

You can read about [Tennyson's poem](#).

And you can [listen to Tennyson reading his own poem](#) in a very early recording.

'We Lived Happily during the War' by Ilya Kaminsky (b. 1977)

The poet

Born into a Jewish family in Odesa in what was then the USSR, Ilya Kaminsky's family was given political asylum in the USA in 1993. Kaminsky lost most of his hearing at the age of 4, owing to misdiagnosed mumps, and did not obtain hearing aids until he emigrated. His family were granted asylum as life had become difficult for Jewish families in what had now become Ukraine, and they had also been persecuted as 'enemies of the people' by the Soviet regime. These experiences all informed the poems in his volume *Deaf Republic*, which imagines a world in which people choose to be deaf as part of a political protest, in response to the shooting of a deaf boy. He described this as a fairy tale in verse. 'We Lived Happily during the War' is the first poem in this collection. In 2019, the BBC World Service named Kaminsky as one of '12 Artists who Changed the World in 2019'. His first book was 'Dancing in Odessa' (2004) and he has been very active as a translator of poetry, and legal advocate for refugees, immigrants and orphaned children.

The poem

This poem was written in 2013, and became the first poem in *Deaf Republic*, a fairy tale but based on real life events. It imagines a war in which America is 'falling' - which you can interpret in many ways - but the speaker of the poem does nothing. He and the others allow the war to happen and are implicated in the 'fall' because they failed to stop the war. The speaker asks for forgiveness and is confessing that those who did nothing are also to blame. He asks people to acknowledge their own involvement in conflict if they have profited from it, or simply looked after their own without protesting enough or resisting when 'they bombed other people's houses'. The speaker wants us to pay attention to our own guilt if we have chosen money and luxury and ignored oppression. What is the price we pay for ignoring conflict around us and living in a world of money?

Responding to the poem

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Questions to ask about 'We Lived Happily during the War'

1. Compare line three and other short lines in this poem and the way they slow down your reading: what do these lines make the reader think about? (AO1)
2. '*Not enough*' is repeated: why does the speaker dwell on this? (AO1)
3. What might taking a chair outside and watching the sun mean? (AO1)
4. Why has the poet put this poem in the past tense? (AO1/AO2)
5. Why does the writer repeat the reference to their '*bed*'? And why has he switched to the first person in these lines? (AO1/AO2)
6. Why does the writer repeat the phrase '*of money*' four times and what is the structure of this list? What point is he making about why people don't act? (AO1/AO2)
7. Why does the writer follow the enjambment '*America/was falling*' by a colon and what does he mean by an '*invisible house*'? (AO1/AO2)
8. What is the effect of the choice of pronouns in the first line of the poem and the way in which it runs on from the title into the second line of the poem? (AO2)
9. Explore the effect of the enjambment '*America/was falling*'. (AO2)
10. How does the parenthesis '*(forgive us)*' change the way you re-read the phrase '*We lived happily during the war*'? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Envy' – contrast different reasons for conflict and for inaction
- 'Boat Stealing' – learning moral lessons
- 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' – the threat of destruction
- 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' – different forms of oppression and 'internal difference' compared to external conflict
- 'Vergissmeinnicht' – guilt and blame for conflict
- 'What Were They Like?' – allowing destruction to happen
- 'Lament' – global nature of modern conflict
- 'Flag' – how patriotism can blind you (or make you deaf) to the suffering of others
- 'Honour Killing' – Effective use of patterns of repetition and short verse lines
- 'Partition' – the human cost of guilt and indifference to suffering.
- 'Colonization in Reverse' – how communities respond to conflict and change
- 'Papa-T' – the history of conflict and rebellion
- 'Thirteen' – the experience of being marginalised compared with ignoring oppression
- 'Songs for the People' - contrasting the experience of war and visions of peace

Links for further research

Find out more about [Ilya Kaminsky's story and views](#) about poetry.

[BBC interview with Kaminsky](#) (about 6.45 minutes in).

Ilya Kaminsky reads '[We Lived Happily During the War](#)'.

You can find a very interesting [podcast analysis \(and transcript\)](#) on Poetry Unbound.

This analysis makes effective [links between the poem and other poems](#) in Deaf republic.

You can read [more extracts from 'Deaf Republic'](#) (illustrated with sign language).

You might want to compare [Muriel Rukyser's 'I lived in the first century of world wars'](#).

'Thirteen' by Caleb Femi (b. 1990)

The poet

Caleb Femi was born in Nigeria. When he was 7, he migrated to England to join his parents and was brought up on the North Peckham estate in South London, where many Nigerian migrants live. It was on this estate where Damilola Taylor was killed in 2000, ten days before his 11th birthday, by two white brothers aged 12 and 13 at the time. The estate, one of the most deprived and ethnically diverse places in Europe was demolished, but Peckham was still a focus for rioting in 2011. However, Peckham has also generated creativity in popular music, film and culture. Femi taught English in a North London secondary from 2014 to 2016, when he was chosen as the first Spread the Word young people's Laureate for London in 2016. His first collection of poems, *Poor*, was published by Penguin in 2020. He has called the volume a 'love letter' to his community. Femi is also a filmmaker, director and photographer: his photographs are an integral part of the volume. Femi therefore celebrates formal hybridity as well as hybrid identity.

The poem

This poem is one of a group of poems giving voice to young black boys growing up in the North Peckham experience, illustrated by photographs in *Poor*. However, Femi could be writing about any young men, in any city. Femi uses the second person to address the boy who has just become a teenage and predict his future. He predicts that the boy will be falsely accused, and he contrasts this with a memory of the policeman visiting the boy's primary and predicting a bright future. The poem addresses what goes wrong with youthful promise, and how prejudice limits the opportunities of boys like this one. The hope that the young child could escape the conflicts of society and become a bright star darkens the moment he begins to grow up and face the false assumptions of the real world. Femi contrasts these conflicting archetypes and asks why they are part of the world he grew up in.

Responding to the poem

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Questions to ask about 'Thirteen'

1. Whose voices do we hear in this poem? (AO1)
2. What is the meaning of the '*horizon in the east*' of the smile on the police officer's face? (AO1)
3. How does the poem contrast the innocent world of the Primary School child with the powerlessness he experiences when he is questioned? (AO1)
4. What is the relevance of the memory that supernovas are in fact identical with dying stars? (AO1)
5. How is the image of '*black holes*' related to Femi's desire to chart what it is like to be young and poor and black? (AO1)
6. Why does the poet use the future tense at the beginning of each stanza? (AO2)
7. What is the effect of repeating the word '*thirteen*' at the end of the first stanza? (AO2)
8. Where and why does he use italics in the poem? (AO2)
9. The extended metaphor of '*stars*' is used from second stanza onwards. How is this metaphor developed? (AO2)
10. What is the effect of the line '*You will watch the two men cast lots for your organs*' and what does it remind you of? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Envy' – origins of conflict
- 'Boat Stealing' – presentation of boyhood and experiences of loss of innocence
- 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' – conflicting cultures
- 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' – awareness of affliction and difference
- 'Vergissmeinnicht' – contrasts between love and conflict
- 'What Were They Like?' – communities damaged by conflict
- 'Lament' – young people drawn into conflict
- 'Flag' – black identity and conflicting loyalties
- 'Honour Killing' – prejudice and its consequences
- 'Partition' – young people growing up in communities defined by conflict
- 'Colonization in Reverse' – Migrant experiences in London and the Black diaspora
- 'Papa-T' – childhood innocence contrasted with the experience of conflict
- 'We Lived Happily during the War' – responses when things go wrong
- 'Songs for the People' - contrast the hope of overcoming conflict, especially for children and young people

Links for further research

This video shows [Femi introducing and reading his poetry](#).

This is a much [longer interview but very revealing](#).

This is [Caleb Femi's homepage](#).

In this interview, [Femi talks about his life, influences and his collection *Poor*](#).

More [background for the collection *Poor*](#).

[Damilola's story](#).

This [blog has resources for studying 'Thirteen'](#).

Femi also [addresses the Grenfell and Kings Cross fires](#) and is a huge admirer of the poetry of Jay Bernard published in *Surge*. See especially Bernard's poem 'Flowers'.

'Songs for the People' by Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911)

The poet

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was the Amanda Gorman of her time: a poet, activist, teacher, abolitionist and suffragist, she was a powerful voice for African Americans and for women in the nineteenth century. She was also a novelist and vice president of the 'National Association of Coloured Women'. Her first book of poems was published in Baltimore when she was just 20, collecting verses published in anti-slavery journals. She grew up an orphan and campaigned against slavery and segregation of races, refusing to give up her seat in a trolley car or sit in a separate section. Her fame grew nationally during the American Civil War (1861-65) and her novels dealt with the problems of reconstruction in the South after the war. She passionately challenged prejudices about gender as well as race, believing that Black people and especially women needed to set their own goals and defend their rights to equal treatment before the law.

The poem

'Songs of the People' is based on a binary opposition between the world of conflict, oppression and division in which Harper lived, and an imagined world of harmony and new songs, for which she wants to sing. Today we would call Harper a performance poet: critics at the time praised her 'dramatic voice' and 'captivating eloquence'. The poem uses a ballad stanza with four strong beats per line but a varying number of unstressed syllables, together with rhyming couplets. These provide a music similar to the hymns that Harper would have sung in abolitionist Christian communities. However, the music here is universal, and based on a political vision of peace, arguing that the world needs a different music of 'more abundant life'. This harmonious music will silence the harshness and discord of battles and wrong.

Responding to the poem

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AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts: maintain a critical style; develop an informed personal response; use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant terminology where appropriate.

Questions to ask about 'Songs for the People'

1. What does Harper want 'songs for the people' to have in common with battle-cries and war music? (AO1)
2. In what ways will her songs be different from the poetry of conflict? (AO1)
3. How does she contrast the lives of the oppressed with her vision of the future? (AO1)
4. What kind of music will both stir and comfort them? (AO1)
5. How does repetition reinforce the music of the poem from the first stanza? (AO1)
6. How does Harper imagine a world without conflict and what change will it need? (AO1/AO2)
7. How does Harper vary the rhythms of different lines? Give two contrasting examples and comment on their effect. (AO2)
8. Where does she use sound effects to contrast the music of war and the harmony of peace? (AO2)
9. How does she use imagery and synecdoche to suggest the effects of music on different parts of the body? (AO2)
10. How do her final lines use imagery associated with the feminine to transform the 'hearts of men'? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Envy' – contrasting conflict and discontent with the flowering of a different music
- 'Boat Stealing' – how inner conflict can be channelled into a vision of moral education
- 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' – comparing the sounds and rhythms of war with heavenly harmony
- 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' – overcoming oppression and difference
- 'Vergissmeinnicht' – contrasting the battlefield and love
- 'What Were They Like?' – singing and silence in the face of destruction
- 'Lament' – reactions to war comparing lamentation to new songs
- 'Flag' – compare rallying around a flag and making a song for the people
- 'Honour Killing' – 'new geography' and 'new songs' to replace the constraints of the past
- 'Partition' – compare the 'cries of the people' and Harper's songs of civil war and reconstruction
- 'Papa-T' – replacing the 'clash of sabres' with a multiracial harmony
- 'We Lived Happily During the War' – contrasting ways of learning from conflict
- 'Thirteen' – visions of the 'bright and restful mansions' and their opportunity for fulfilment

Links for further research

This biography has more information about [Harper as a young writer](#)

And this website has information about her education and her role as a [Conductor of the Underground Railroad for escaped slaves](#)

Carol Rumens provides a stimulating analysis of another of [Harper's poems here](#)

Julie Enszer writes about [how Harper's poem resonates with activists today](#)

Here is a [Youtube video](#) which celebrates the poem with a reading

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