

GCSE (9–1)

ENGLISH LITERATURE

**J352/02: Poetry across time
Love and Relationships cluster**

Teacher Guide

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Introduction

Changes to the ‘Love and Relationships’ 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 Broken Appointment’, Thomas Hardy	‘Looking at Your Hands’, Martin Carter
‘Fin de Fete’, Charlotte Mew	‘Poem for My Love’, June Jordan
‘The Sorrow of True Love’, Edward Thomas	‘Flirtation’, Rita Dove
‘An Arundel Tomb’ Philip Larkin	‘The Perseverance’, Raymond Antrobus
‘Long Distance II’, Tony Harrison	‘Lullaby’, Fatimah Asghar

'Looking at Your Hands' by Martin Carter (1927-1997)

The poet

Martin Carter was born in 1927 in Georgetown, British Guiana, which is Guyana. After graduating he worked in the civil service until forced to resign and was eventually imprisoned for some months in 1953-54 because of his involvement in independence movements. He had just got married and his first child had been born. At this time his *Poems of Resistance* were published in London, making Carter one of the first Caribbean poets to be published outside the Caribbean. After independence, he was a government minister and represented Guyana in the United Nations but later resigned his government positions. He was widely respected as a historian as well as a poet and politician. An important influence on later Guyanese writers, his poetry was quoted by Danny Glover at a concert for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The poem

A protest poem, 'Looking at Your Hands' is an early poem by Martin Carter and sits in a cluster of his poems which negotiate personal relationships and political commitment. Here he is expressing solidarity with sugar plantation workers protesting against British exploitation. However, he is also explaining his commitment to writing about their struggles in very personal and physical terms. For Carter, personal relationships and politics work together as both are transformative of the world.

The poem is addressed to a 'dear friend' who is directly addressed in the second person. The poet references books, speeches and marches as inspiration. Change, for Carter involves relationships and commitments, and is a physical process. That's why the poem takes its title from the line 'looking at your hands'. But it is also about using dreams to make people see the world in a different way: 'dream to change the world'.

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.

Links for further research

There is an edited interview with Martin Carter in *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* ed E. A. Markham (Bloodaxe, 1989). In this interview, he says of 'Looking at Your Hands': 'one dreams to change the world knowing the world is not changeable in the ordinary sense, and therefore what you get there is hope that other people will want to change the world – not expecting anyone to change the world physically, but if your mind is changed, the world is changed. If I see the world differently, that's a different world'.

[Rosaliene Bacchus blog](#)

Caribbean Beat: [Martin Carter; The Poems Man](#)

Questions to ask about 'Looking at Your Hands'

1. Who do you think the poem is addressed to and why? (AO1)
2. Why are books referenced twice in this poem? (AO1)
3. What kind of past is the poet alluding to in the second stanza? (AO1)
4. What is meant by the image of 'a room without a light'? (AO1)
5. Why do you think 'hands' are so important in this poem? (AO1)
6. What is the effect of the exclamations which make up the first two lines? (AO2)
7. What is the effect of imagery of 'walking in the sun' and what could that 'fire' refer to? (AO2)
8. What is the effect of the change of tense in stanza three? (AO2)
9. What is the effect of the use of participles in three successive lines? (AO2)
10. How does the last line of the third stanza differ from the last line of stanza two, and what is the effect of repetition and contrast in these lines? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'A Song' - the competing demands of public and private life
- 'Bright Star' - the physical body
- 'Now' - the importance of 'the moment eternal'
- 'Love and Friendship' - love and commitment
- 'Love After Love' - commitment to a happier future
- 'Morning Song' - dreams of the future
- 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine' - the rejection of shallow commitments
- 'In Paris With You' - enjoying the immediate (contrasted with the above)
- 'Warming Her Pearls' - the political context of relationships
- 'Dusting the Phone' - the political context of relationships

To what extent is the personal also political in other poems?

What is the relationship between dreams of love and dreams of a better world in poems in the cluster?

How does the imagery of the human body imply or represent other kinds of commitment in other poems?

'Poem for My Love' by June Jordan (1936-2002)

The poet

June Jordan was a Jamaican-American poet and activist, famous for the passion of her protest poems. A professor at the University of California Berkeley, she contributed to feminist, Black American and queer discourses, and is on the Wall of Honor in the Stonewall National Monument. She said "the role of the poet, beginning with my own childhood experience, is to deserve the trust of people who know that what you do is work with words".

The poem

This is a late poem by Jordan and we don't know who it is addressed to – it was published after her death, in her *Collected Poems Directed by Desire*. A love poem, it also references nature, faith and dreams of the night while evoking a very personal sense of calm and peace in the arms of the beloved. She addresses love as a vision of 'possibility'. The language is both sensual and sensuous, invoking the human body and the actions of the natural world.

Responding to the poem

The poetry section of the exam assesses AO1 and AO2.

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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 'Poem for My Love'

1. How does the poet make their love seem surprising and improbable, yet contented? (AO1)
2. How does the poet contrast inside and outside? (AO1)
3. How are different elements referenced in the poem? (AO1)
4. There are 13 lines in this poem: how might this relate to the sonnets in the cluster? (AO1)
5. How do pronouns change in the course of the poem? (AO2)
6. Why does the poet not use question marks for the opening questions? (AO2)
7. What is the significance of the 'stars' in line 3? (AO2)
8. What is the effect of the lines made up of single words? (AO2)
9. Why are the men waiting for a 'womanly mirage' and what might this image mean? (AO2)
10. What do you think is the intended effect of references to darkness and colour? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Song' - physical discontent and imagery of a storm
- 'Bright Star' - imagery of the night and stars
- 'Now' - making 'perfect the present'
- 'Love and Friendship' - use of the natural world to illustrate relationships
- 'Love After Love' - contentment after struggle
- 'Morning Song' - imagery of the night and dreams
- 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine' - surprises
- 'In Paris With You' - direct address of the beloved; the physicality of love
- 'Warming Her Pearls' - watching the beloved
- 'Dusting the Phone' - obsession
- 'Looking at Your Hands' - the personal and the political

Compare other LGBTQ poets in the cluster such as James Fenton, Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay and Fatimah Asghar.

Are there similarities and differences between the ways in which these poets write about love?

Are there common elements of transgression in the imagery and voice chosen by these poets?

Is 'queerness' an aspect of other poems in the cluster?

Links for further research

Listen to [June Jordan read the poem](#)

[Carol Rumens explores Jordan's late poetry](#)

[Explore other published poems](#)

[Jordan was an innovative teacher of poetry](#)

[Donna Masini writes passionately about Jordan and teaching](#)

You could follow this up with [extracts from this discussion of Jordan's legacy as poet, teacher and activist](#)

'Flirtation' by Rita Dove (b. 1952)

The poet

Born in Ohio, African American poet Rita Dove teaches Creative Writing and has been US Poet Laureate and a Pulitzer Prize winner. One of her particular interests is the legacy of the African diaspora. She has lived in Germany, Ireland as well as the US and is an avid ballroom dancer. She contributed, with John Williams and Steven Spielberg to the White House millennial celebration at the Lincoln Memorial. History and the other arts are important inspirations for her poetry. She has also written about her experiences with multiple sclerosis since her diagnosis in 1997.

The poem

The poem could be about any kind of flirtation: it's about the beginning of a relationship and perhaps not even a serious one, but about making the most of the moment. Explore the different images and senses explored in the poem. Why is there *'no need/to say anything'* and how do metaphors and sensuous language replace words? The poem is about indirect expression and *'walking through'* and enjoying the sensation of flirtation.

Responding to the poem

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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 'Flirtation'

1. Where does the poet make allusions to other art forms? (AO1)
2. How does the poet treat the quiet of the night? (AO1)
3. Why choose a peeled and quartered orange for a cheeky comparison with the act of flirtation? (AO1)
4. What is the effect of the stanza break and the enjambment between lines 2 and 3? (AO2)
5. The image of the orange is itself compared to *'a tulip on a wedgewood plate'*: what is the effect of this double comparison? (AO2)
6. Personification brings the physical scene to life: what's the effect of the choice of actions by sun and night? (AO2)
7. Alliteration and sibilance contribute to the sensuous qualities of the writing: where do we see this? (AO2)
8. Where are different senses conjured up in this poem and what is the effect? (AO2)
9. Why is flirtation compared to a *'topiary'*? (AO2)
10. What's the effect of the single line stanza at the end of the poem? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Song' - the loneliness of the speaker
- 'Bright Star' - sensuous depiction of night time
- 'Now' - making the most of a single moment
- 'Love and Friendship' - the treatment of nature
- 'Love After Love' - elation
- 'Morning Song' - the stars and music
- 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine' - challenging convention
- 'In Paris With You' - sensuality
- 'Warming Her Pearls' - restless nights
- 'Dusting the Phone' - longing and desire
- 'Looking at Your Hands' - the portrayal of flesh
- 'Poem for My Love' - being surprised by quiet desire; togetherness; pleasure

Links for further research

[Rita Dove's life has been aspirational and inspirational](#)

[A recent interview for Guernicamag.com](#)

[Recordings of Dove reading](#)

[Rita Dove reading and discussing some poems with students](#)

'The Perseverance' by Raymond Antrobus (b 1986)

The poet

Raymond Antrobus was born in Hackney in 1986: his mother was English and his father an emigrant from Jamaica. He writes about his mixed heritage and about deafness: his deafness was undiagnosed until he was six and he was at first thought to have learning difficulties. Both parents had 'a passion for poetry' and the love of his parents inspires his own writing. Antrobus is a performance poet who has appeared with Warsan Shire, Kae Tempest and others. *The Perseverance* was also the title of his debut volume, published in 2016 and attracted much attention from shortlists for poetry prizes and books of the year.

The poem

In the poem 'The Perseverance' the title comes from the name of a local pub, but also represents Antrobus's own perseverance with the problems of deafness, being mixed race and having a much-loved alcoholic father. He explores relationships as about patience and perseverance. 'Overstanding' is a Rastafarian phrase which means 'having the big picture' or going beyond basic understanding. It has implications of positivity, strength and respect. Who is the '*man overstanding*' of the epigraph? Is it the father or the poet himself? How has he learned that relationships are about perseverance?

Responding to the poem

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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 'The Perseverance'

1. What images illustrate the boy's home life? (AO1)
2. What is the heritage his father 'serves' up for his son? (AO1)
3. What is the link between '*overstanding*' and '*perseverance*'? (AO1)
4. What are the different things the poet might mean by the poem's penultimate line? (AO1)
5. What does his father like about the pub and how does the poet use repetition to emphasise this? (AO1/AO2)
6. Why does the poet not use capital letters for the name '*perseverance*'? (AO2)
7. Why does the poet use italics in line 2? (AO2)
8. What's the effect of the transition between stanza two and stanza three? (AO2)
9. How effective is the parking meter simile and why? (AO2)
10. Which words keep being repeated in the rhymes and patterns of the poem and to what effect? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Song' – mixed feelings about relationships
- 'Bright Star' - steadiness and loneliness
- 'Now' - meeting and separation
- 'Love and Friendship' - difficulties in love
- 'Love After Love' - a fractured relationship
- 'Morning Song' - bonding of parents and children
- 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine' - popular culture
- 'In Paris With You' - sleaziness
- 'Warming Her Pearls' - waiting
- 'Dusting the Phone' - impatience
- 'Looking at Your Hands' - Caribbean culture
- 'Poem for My Love' - dependency
- 'Flirtation' - night landscapes
- 'Lullaby' - parents

Links for further research

[Antrobus reads from and talks about the collection 'The Perseverance'](#)

[Explore the poet's website](#)

Raymond Antrobus [travelled back to Jamaica with the British Council](#)

[Antrobus talks about his deafness](#)

'Lullaby' by Fatimah Asghar (1990-)

The poet

Fatimah Asghar is a South Asian Muslim American poet. She works as a screenwriter, and is the co-creator of *Brown Girls* (2017), an HBO comedy series which explores issues of femininity, ethnicity, sexuality and careers in the arts. Her mother was Kashmiri and witnessed post-Partition violence. Her father was from Pakistan. They emigrated to the USA, and had both died before Asghar was 5. Many of her poems address her identity as an orphan, and her family's history as refugees as the legacy of Partition. She also writes about those historical atrocities, the current political situation in the USA, her dual identity, sexuality and coming of age, and her emotional recovery from experiences of sexual assault in her volume of poetry *If They Come For Us*. With Safia Elhillo, she has edited *Halal If You Hear Me*, an anthology of writing by Muslims who are queer, genderqueer, nonbinary or trans.

The poem

This is another poem which links questions of identity and poetic selfhood with the love of parents and their relationship. Khudejha is Asghar's sister so the poem is addressed to her, and based on the stories she told about their parents. She imagines their dead parents awakening at different ends of the world and meeting together in an imaginary tunnel to dance all night in the underworld. Why does Asghar call this poem 'Lullaby' and how might her sister's stories have soothed the sadness of the young orphaned girl?

Responding to the poem

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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 'Lullaby'

1. How does the poet set up binary oppositions in stanzas two and three in order to resolve them later in the poem? (AO1)
2. In what sense might the lovers dance be *'their way back'*? (AO1)
3. What do you think is the significance of her parents' physical imperfections? (AO1)
4. Compare the phrases *'light the underworld'* and *'winks the dark'*. (AO1/AO2)
5. How does the poem turn sad feelings into ones of celebration? (AO1/AO2)
6. The poet does not follow conventions of punctuation. What is the effect of this on the reader? (AO2)
7. How does the sibilance of the first stanza connect with the title? (AO2)
8. Why does the poet personify the planet in stanza four? (AO2)
9. What does she mean by *'dirt skies and worm stars'* and how does she convert the macabre to the beautiful? (AO2)
10. How does the poet show that she is also moving back in time in the last three stanzas? (AO2)

Connections and contrasts with other anthology poems

- 'Song' - other night songs
- 'Bright Star' - other night songs; links between love and death
- 'Now' - moments of perfect rapture
- 'Love and Friendship' - persistency of relationships
- 'Love After Love' - consolation
- 'Morning Song' - parents and children
- 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine' - unsentimental love
- 'In Paris With You' - use of place names
- 'Warming Her Pearls' - comfort and discomfort
- 'Dusting the Phone' - making connections
- 'Looking at Your Hands' - personal relationships and the political; ethnic identity
- 'Poem for My Love' - the beauty of personal connections and relationships
- 'Flirtation' - the beauty of personal connections and relationships
- 'The Perseverance' - links between parents and identity

Compare with other poems by LGBTQ writers in the cluster and explore the diverse ways they write about love, family and relationships.

Explore other South Asian poets such as Imtiaz Dharker and Sujata Bhatt, or writers of mixed heritage such as Jackie Kay and John Agard.

Explore how questions of ethnicity and identity are addressed by poets like Audre Lorde, Ocean Vuong, Jay Bernard, Danez Smith and Malika Booker.

Links for further research

[Review Asghar's poems](#), including an interview.

A number of [reviews](#) are gathered here

[Asghar talks about her writing and the communities she writes for](#)

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