

Poetic voice starts by dismissing stereotypical valentine gifts - doesn't think they hold much worth.

Speaker is addressing a romantic partner but gives something unexpected.

"Light" has positive connotations. Reflects optimism at the start of relationships. Simile compares the shedding of onion layers to delving deeper into a relationship. Love requires a careful hand. "careful undressing" creates image of undressing a partner.

One word sentence suggests simplicity/straight forward - something is being given - forceful presentation.

Single sentence stanza reflects person's desire to remain honest and keep things simple and realistic.

Link back to the start of the poem - another reminder that the speaker disapproves of cliché gifts. Alliteration of "cute card" and "red rose" could suggest Duffy's belief that it's overused in love poems.

Word choice - connotations of jealousy, distrust and insecurity.

Short sentence hints that speaker has become a bit desperate and worries the gift will not be accepted and neither will she.

Casual offer reinforces the idea that a more honest type of love is more important and true.

#### Themes

- Love
- Relationships
- Violence

Poem is written in free-verse. The form echoes that of an onion and the layers that make it up - rejects tradition.

Negative aspects of conventional relationships can be restrictive to the individual - but a love that is true is worth pursuing.

Title suggests poem will deal with conventional notions of love - proved wrong in first line.

## Valentine

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.  
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.  
It promises light  
like the careful undressing of love.

Here.  
It will blind you with tears  
like a lover.  
It will make your reflection  
a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.  
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,  
possessive and faithful  
as we are,  
for as long as we are.

Take it.  
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding-ring,  
if you like.

Lethal.  
Its scent will cling to your fingers,  
cling to your knife.

Carol Ann Duffy

Metaphor - "moon" has connotations of romance but "brown paper" gives the impression of being everyday or nothing special - ties in with the poet's idea of real love - real gifts don't need embellishment.

"Careful" suggests tenderness, affection to allow barriers to come down and expose themselves.

Simile - accepts the truth about love - it isn't all perfect and happy - onion's scent compared to hurting the one you love.

Metaphor - referring to the person's reflection when one's eyes are full of tears - love can distress - destructive.

Tone change from gentle/honest to threatening.

Another reminder of their desire to give meaningful gifts.

Cynical about love - instead of promising to last forever, the relationship will only last for as long as they work at it.

Even when love is true, there can be hard times or danger. Suggests passion can get out of control - darker associations.

Marriage might restrict a person. Idea of being constricted.

The further you get into a relationship the more serious it gets - ending in marriage.

Another reminder that love can be dangerous and violent at times. The knife can destroy the onion.

Suggests the possessive side of love and how it can lead to tension.



## Valentine Notes

**Summary:** The poem challenges the stereotypical view of a Valentine's gift when the speaker presents their lover with the metaphorical onion as a moon wrapped in brown paper. The multi-layered complexity of the onion represents a real relationship and is used as an extended metaphor throughout. The strangeness of this unusual gift, which can make a lover cry, highlights the negative as well as the positive effects of a deep and loving relationship. The forceful presentation of this gift, and the final word choice, also suggests this is a relationship which is cruel, domineering and menacing. Therefore the poem illustrates that the speaker understands the truth of love and wants to offer a gift that symbolise a pure and lasting feeling as opposed to just following the crowd and giving a meaningless, traditional valentine present.

**Narration:** First person speaking directly to the unnamed lover, the speaker is universal as they are not named or shown to be male or female. This narration makes the speaker's thoughts and feelings clearly personal but also something that we as reader's can relate to.

**Relationships:** The speaker is in love with their lover. They are trying to be romantic by giving them an onion, which they see as a romantic gift and symbolic of their feelings. They do believe that love can end badly if the people involved act in a flawed manner and wish to avoid that by doing things in their own individual way.

**Structure:** The poem is written in free verse using irregular stanzas to support its content and purpose, which is to reject traditional restrictive conventions such as marriage and other notions of love and to warn lovers that being overly possessive can have undesirable consequences. While ostensibly a poem on the theme of love, Duffy deliberately avoids the use of language or imagery that we associate with this type of poetry. Instead, the words are often stark and monosyllabic to allow her to present her ideas clearly and unambiguously.

**Themes:** Love, Destruction, Honesty, Consequences, Contrast

### Quotations

"Not a red rose or a satin heart." – word choice

"I give you an onion.

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper." - metaphor

"It will blind you with tears  
like a lover." - simile

"Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips  
possessive and faithful" – word choice

"Take it.  
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring." – word choice

"Lethal.  
Its scent will cling to your fingers,  
cling to your knife" - short sentence/word choice

**Links with:** Mrs Midas, In Mrs Tilscher's Class, War Photographer



## Valentine Textual Analysis

1. Referring closely to lines 1-2, identify the tone of the poem  
2 marks

2) Referring to poetic technique, show how contrast is used in lines 2-10 to help develop the speaker's ideas 4 marks

3. Show how any example of the poet's use of language in lines 11-17 effectively contributes to the main ideas or concerns of the poem. 2 marks

4. How effective do you find any aspect of the final stanza as a conclusion to the poem? Your answer might deal with ideas and/or language. 2 marks

5. With close textual reference, show how the ideas and/or language of this poem are similar OR different to another poem or poems by Carol Ann Duffy which you have read.

10 marks



Duffy was friends with a war photographer and was intrigued by the challenges they face.

Intimate and tranquil setting of his dark room. He's normally surrounded by chaos and values this time alone - enjambment creates sense of reflection.

Religious imagery - simile compares him to a priest - sense of ritual in the way he develops film - has seen difficult things - same respect a priest would have when preparing for communion.

Short sentence breaks calmness of darkroom and reminds him of his responsibility.

In order to do his job he must remain detached and professional - but when he's alone the emotion gets to him.

Our children don't have to worry about landmines whilst playing - injustice.

Adds drama and suspense - suggests he is not fully in control.

Picture hasn't developed fully but as the man no longer exists he has become a ghost - "ghost" has connotations of haunting - idea that these images haunt him.

Connotations of extreme pain - highlights the suffering of these people.

Bathos - insincere response from us - we feel pity for a while but then return to over indulgent lives.

#### Themes

- Horrors of war
- Apathy
- Loss
- Isolation

Word choice - place of peace and sanctuary after being confronted with horrors.

## War Photographer

Alliteration draws attention to the horrific images and the fact he tries to restore order to the chaotic images.

Rigid structure contrasts with the chaotic images described in poem. They mirror the photographer who tries to maintain a strict order.

In his dark room he is finally alone  
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.  
The only light is red and softly glows,  
as though this were a church and he  
a priest preparing to intone a Mass.  
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

From New Testament - emphasises how fragile life is and that all must die

Connotations of the light that burns in Catholic churches to symbolise the presence of Christ - also bold - he's seen a lot of this.

One word sentences for each war zone he has photographed. Each gets its own sentence to highlight how important it is to remember.

He has a job to do. Solutions slip in trays  
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then  
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again  
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,  
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet  
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Famous photo of kids running from napalm attack in Vietnam helped end the conflict - but now we have become desensitised to these images.

Alliteration - ambiguous meaning - could be the chemicals used or his hope that the pictures may help to resolve the conflicts they depict.

He notes the contrast between home and the war zones - our problems are sorted by good weather - no idea of real suffering.

Something is happening. A stranger's features  
faintly start to twist before his eyes,  
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries  
of this man's wife, how he sought approval  
without words to do what someone must  
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

Word choice - connotations of something permanent - always to be remembered.

Suggests both the development of the picture and the pain of his last moments.

Couldn't communicate with the wife and had to rely purely on looks - like a priest - had to attend to his final moments - profession is a calling.

A hundred agonies in black and white  
from which his editor will pick out five or six  
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick  
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.  
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where  
he earns his living and they do not care.

Careless indifference of editor shows how little we care for the people suffering far away.

He doesn't feel that he belongs to either world.

Growing acceptance that despite his best efforts his photos will make no difference.

Carol Ann Duffy

Duffy shares an affinity with war photographers - they use photography to convey truths about the human condition - she uses words and language to do the same.



## War Photographer Notes

**Summary:** This poem describes a war photographer who is developing his photographs in his home in England. He starts reflecting on his experiences. He has seen terrible things and even though he stayed calm and professional at the time now he gives in to his emotions and shows that he is upset and scared. By the end the photographer is preparing to return to a warzone and is angry that nobody else cares about the severity of what he shows in his photos.

**Narration:** Third person used to describe the experience of a war photographer. By viewing this issue from the perspective of the photographer, she also reveals the difficulties of such an occupation. By the end of the poem, it is clear her subject straddles two vastly different worlds yet increasingly feels he belongs to neither.

**Relationships:** The photographer feels pity and sympathy for the people in the warzones and potentially guilty that he is unable to help them. He feels anger for the society he lives in as they do not feel the compassion her does and does not feel like he belongs anywhere.

**Structure:** The poem is laid out in four regular six-line stanzas, with each stanza ending in a rhyming couplet. This structure is interesting since its very rigid order contrasts with the chaotic, disturbing images described in the poem. This organisation mirrors the actions of the photographer, who lays out his films in "ordered rows", as though in doing so he can in some way help to restore order to this chaotic world. The poem moves through a series of observations in the first three stanzas to a conclusion of sorts in the fourth.

The style is almost clinical and matter of fact, perhaps to imitate the clinical approach required by people in this line of work to allow them to do their jobs under extreme pressure. Unlike the readers of the newspaper he works for, this sense of distance is a necessary requirement for the photographer. Duffy concentrates on the sense of sight throughout the poem and the final image is almost like a photograph itself, depicting the journalist surveying the landscape and its inhabitants below impassively as he travels to his next assignment.

**Themes:** Destruction, Anger, Isolation, Death, Contrasts, Consequences

### Quotations

spools of suffering set out in ordered rows." - alliteration/word choice

"as though his were a church and he  
a priest preparing to intone a Mass." - metaphor

"Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass." - short sentence/list/word choice

"Solutions slop in trays  
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then  
though seem to now." - alliteration/word choice

"to fields which don't explode beneath the feet  
of running children in a nightmare heat." - word choice

"a half-formed ghost" - metaphor

"A hundred agonies in black and white  
from which his editor will pick out fix or six" - hyperbole/word choice

"The reader's eyeballs prick  
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers." - word choice

**Links with:** In Mrs Tilscher's Class, Originally, Mrs Midas



## War Photographer Textual Analysis

1. By referring closely to lines 1-6, examine and comment upon the mood created in stanza 1. 2 marks
2. The photographer himself is disturbed by the images he is processing. Show how Duffy uses language to convey the photographer's feelings in verse 2 (lines 7-12). 4 marks
3. Looking at verse 3 (lines 13-18), show how Duffy emphasises the emotional impact of the photographer's work. 2 marks
4. Focusing on the last verse (lines 19-24), examine how Duffy conveys the contrast between the photographer and those he works for: the editor and the public. 2 marks
5. In "War Photographer" Duffy uses contrast very effectively. Explore the effectiveness of the technique in this poem and at least one other poem by Duffy. 10 marks



Poem focuses on the importance of origins and how we define our identity.

Red has connotations of anger - how she felt about being forced to leave.

**Themes**

- \*Identity
- \*Loss
- \*Childhood
- \*Isolation

Mother is optimistic and happy about move - clear contrast to Duffy's emotions - unsure if father is there with them or at the new place.

**Originally**

"We" - decision to move affected all of them. Assonance of "our own" reinforces her sense of belonging to that place.

Alliteration draws attention to the lack of control she felt.

Brothers share her feelings. Word choice of "bawling" emphasises how upset they are - repetition of "home" reflects childish habit of repeating one's self.

We came from our own country in a red room  
 which fell through the fields, our mother singing  
 our father's name to the turn of the wheels.  
 My brothers cried, one of them bawling, Home,  
 Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,  
 the street, the house, the vacant rooms  
 where we didn't live any more. I stared  
 at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

Personification - reflects her own desire to run home - shows the distance travelled to.

List focusing on increasingly specific details shows how much she was thinking about it and her memories there.

Word choice emphasises her innocence - like a child seeking comfort.

Metaphor - childhood compared to a major uprooting - change and transitions that are outwit their control - moving from the comfortable to the uncertain.

Reflects her uncertainty as they head to the unknown.

Elongated, drawn out phrasing/ long sentence show slow stages of childhood.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,  
 leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue  
 where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.  
 Your accent wrong, Corners, which seem familiar,  
 leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys  
 eating worms and shouting words you don't understand.  
 My parents' anxiety stirred like a loose tooth  
 in my head. I want our own country, I said.

Emphasise her confusion and feeling of not belonging - unfamiliar landscape/ culture.

Short abrupt sentences show how sudden the changes were - accent serves as another barrier despite speaking the same language.

Confronted by behaviour and language that's alien to her. Plosives of "big boys" shows she finds them threatening which emphasises her youth.

Autobiographical element shows she still hasn't adjusted and links back to the start.

Simile - shows her parents are worried about them not settling in - tooth comparison highlights idea of a constant irritant or something you can't ignore.

Used 2nd person to involve reader and make them reflect on their childhood and the things they adapted to.

Alliteration draws attention to the fact her brother has become like the other boys - he now fits in to their new home.

But then you forget, or don't recall, or change,  
 and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only  
 a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue  
 shedding its skin like a snake, my voice  
 in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think  
 I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space  
 and the right place? Now, Where do you come from?  
 strangers ask. Originally? And I hesitate.

Simile - she is finally adopting to new home - shows how easy it has become for her to lose her accent.

Use of Scots language reveals she still feels attached to her Scottish roots. "Skelf" means a small bit - shows she is starting to adjust now too.

Rhetorical question - She questions what makes up self and identity but can't decide. She lists some of the things she left behind and wonders if these things influence who she is now.

Short sentence - hesitation reveals that she has mixed feelings about her true origins - wasn't able to adapt as well as her brothers but feels included now.

**Carol Ann Duffy**

Poet struggles to define her identity - acknowledges that she has changed since she was young and that lots of things make up her identity.

- \* Lack of regular rhythm - reflects lack of order in her own life at the time.
- \* Regular structure of 3 stanzas with 8 lines. Poem divided into a straightforward chronology.
- \* Poet matures throughout poem. The starts with a confused tone and moves on to one of reflection.



## Originally Notes

**Summary:** In this autobiographical poem, Duffy considers and explores the sense of isolation and confusion she felt as a child when her family moved from the Gorbals in Glasgow to England. She describes both the literal details of the journey and the move as well as the deeper, metaphorical journey that she and her family experienced as a result of this decision. As the title suggests, she considers to what extent our identity is shaped and defined not only by our environment but by changes in dialect and culture.

**Narration:** First person, from the point of view of Carol Ann Duffy herself. She split it into two sections the experience of her younger self and her feelings she felt about the move and the reflections of her older self questioning her identity and where she belongs.

**Relationships:** Mixed emotions towards her family as she is forced to make a move that she does not want to with her brothers screaming around her. However, she is glad that her family is together and that they can have comfort in each other. She also have mixed emotions about the relationship with the people in England as she is alienated and does not fit in until she changes her character to blend in and then enjoys her life there.

**Structure:** Like much of Duffy's work, the poem has a regular structure and the three stanzas of eight lines help to divide the poem into a straightforward chronology. Stanza one recalls the journey from Glasgow towards her new home, Stanza two explores her initial sense of not fitting in to this new landscape. In the *third stanza she considers the larger question about how our sense of identity is formed, shaped and affected by such transitions.* However, underneath this apparently ordered structure, the poet's anxiety and uncertainty is revealed through the lack of a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme which reinforces the lack of order in her own life at this time. The fact that the poem is mainly composed of a series of fragmented memories, occasionally using deliberately childish words or phrases, is reminiscent of the way most of us recall our own childhood and adds to the authenticity of the poem.

**Themes:** Childhood, Family, Memory, Identity, Changes, Isolation

### Quotations

"the miles rushed back to the city.  
the street, the house, the vacant rooms" - list

"I stared  
at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw." – metaphor/word choice

"All childhood is an emigration" - metaphor

"My parents' anxiety stirred like a loose tooth  
in my head. I want our own country, I said." – simile/direct speech/word choice

"But then you forget, or don't recall, or change" – list/word choice

"seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only  
a skelf of shame" – dialect/word choice/alliteration

"I remember my tongue  
shedding its skin like a snake" - simile

"Where do you come from? strangers ask. Originally? And I hesitate." – questions/short sentence

**Links with:** War Photographer, Havisham, Mrs Midas



## Originally Textual Analysis

1. By referring closely to stanza 1, analyse the use of poetic technique(s) to emphasise the dramatic impact that moving to another country had on the family. 2 marks

2. Look at stanza 2.

"All childhood is an emigration"

Explain fully what the poet means by this. 2 marks

3. In lines 12—16 analyse the use of poetic technique to convey the distress of the family members caused by their "sudden" emigration to a new environment. 4 marks

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of stanza 3 as a conclusion to the poem. Your answer should deal with ideas and/or language. 2 marks

5. Discuss how Carol Ann Duffy uses contrast in this poem and at least one other to highlight the poems' main concerns. 10 marks



Stanza one introduces an idyllic setting.

Title locates the poem in a school environment. The poem explores a young child growing up within a nurturing primary school environment.

The poem has 4 stanzas. The first 2 have 8 lines and describe the positive atmosphere of the classroom. Stanzas 3 and 4 introduce change and growing up and have seven lines, which reflect the destabilising nature of adolescence. Also it is predictable and regular like a school timetable.

## IN MRS TILSCHER'S CLASS

Personal pronoun – creates a chatty tone/engages the reader

**You could travel up the Blue Nile with your finger, tracing the route while Mrs Tilscher **chanted** the scenery Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan.**

Metaphor – compares children's journey growing up with an adventure along the Nile. Long sentence – mirrors the long journey the children take through childhood

Word choice – happy, singing voice of Mrs T

List of one word sentences – mimic the patient way that Mrs T pauses after saying things in class

Chatty tone. Also shows day is broken down

**That for an hour, then a skittle of milk and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.**

Metaphor compares milk bottles to bowling pins, suggests fun and excitement of time spent in Mrs T's class

**A window opened with a long pole.**

Suggests magical, passing of time, something ending and being lost

**The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.**

Word choice brings action from the poem from imagination to reality.

Personification - projecting the child's laughter onto it, which creates a happy atmosphere, establish an uplifting and carefree world, where children are free to grow and find themselves within a nurturing setting.

Short sentence suggests safety/happiness Informal tone

**This was better than home. Enthralling books.**

In stanza two, Duffy continues a wonderful environment of a classroom. She juxtaposes the external world with the descriptions of the classrooms.

**The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.**

Word choice suggests interested/absorbed by the learning/literature. Short sentence emphasises the strength of their feeling

**Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley faded, like a faint uneasy smudge of a mistake.**

**Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found she'd left a good gold star by your name.**

Juxtaposition of security and danger of the moors murderers. Simile – power of loving environment, removes fear

**The scent of a pencil, slowly, carefully, shaved.**

**A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.**

List of adverbs - prolong the line, mimicking the slow act of sharpening a pencil, a universal memory of childhood.

Word choice – suggests positive atmosphere, sense of magic, link to setting

**Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs**

**hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce,**

**followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking**

**away from the lunch queue. A rough boy**

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

**at your parents, appalled, when you got back home .**

Stanza 3 - it is at this point that the child speaker learns how she was born. It is interesting that this stanza takes place outside the classroom, as if this growth could not happen in the bubble Mrs T created.

Word choice – games and enjoyment

Word choice – stupid person, old fashioned

Word choice – link to boys' voices breaking through comparison to frogs

Personification - implies that hasn't been mastered it yet but sounds fun and appealing

Metaphor – represents children growing up. Punctuation links to growing up and links to setting and learning

Word choice suggests sheltered background, snobbish behaviour, immature, lack of knowledge of world. Links to growing up and gaining knowledge of sex

Word choice and parenthesis places the word in the middle of the line, adding emphasis to her horror as her familiar and safe world disintegrates in front of her eyes. Complex sentence to highlight the complex thoughts of the reader

short sentence - evokes her disbelief and perhaps her fear of the unknown Word choice suggests violence, childish reaction, unable to deal with feelings effectively at this stage in the speaker's development.



Stanza 4 describes the child's sexual awakening, as she experiences unfamiliar feelings and no longer finds the answers with Mrs T. The poem ends with the speaker leaving the school gates to embark on the next stage of life.

Metaphor – compares the air to electricity, suggests danger, warnings and also excitement. new energy and excitement fuelling the children. But it also suggests the threat of lightning and storms, suggesting the difficult time of adolescence.

Word choice - conveys the flustered, agitated mood, suggests illness, heat or even excitement

**That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.**  
**A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot, fractious under the heavy sexy sky. You asked her how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled, then turned away. Reports were handed out.**  
**You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown, As the sky split open into a thunderstorm.**

Word choice – compares change of laughing bell to the speaker. Links to stress and excitement that the child perceives in physical terms. "alarm" also suggests a warning of what is ahead

List – suggests the speaker feels uncomfortable, experiencing the beginning of puberty

Pathetic fallacy links to speaker's feelings. Word choice suggests a storm is building. "heavy" suggests the burden of new knowledge and emotions, "sexy" refers to sexual awakening.

Contrast to stanzas 1 and 2. Instead of magical world provided by Mrs T, reality sets in with school reports. Mrs T's role has become ordinary matter of fact.

Having said, when the child goes to Mrs Tilscher to help and a very large paper then the line I will deliberately begin to change the way that can be seen in a lot of people!

2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun – informal tone, speak directly to the reader, make the poem and its themes universal and relatable for all audiences.

Parenthesis – creates emphasis of the speaker's feelings, fear has melted away and turned into eagerness to experience life and leave the world of Mrs T's classroom behind

Pathetic fallacy links to speaker's feelings  
Metaphor – compare with the dramatic feelings about growing up, scary /exciting  
Word choice of split – breaking, damage, loss of innocence, cannot return to past/childhood

#### Themes

- Childhood
- Growing up
- Nostalgia
- Self-realisation
- Innocence
- Contrasts
- Change

- Metaphorical journey in final year of primary school
- It begins in the safety and security of the setting of Mrs T's classroom
- During the year as the speaker changes so does the atmosphere and there begins to be a feeling of fear, danger and excitement



## In Mrs Tilscher's Class Notes

**Summary:** The poem explores a young child growing up within a nurturing primary school environment. Mrs Tilscher, from the poem's title, is portrayed as a loving teacher who has a profound effect on her pupils. This poem is drawn from Duffy's own experience. Mrs Tilscher was a real teacher and therefore the use of the personal pronoun 'you' places her back into the past, as she recalls her positive memories of school. It also enables the reader to identify with her experience, drawing them in to the poem. Duffy uses different times of year to represent the stages in the child's journey towards adolescence.

**Narration:** This poem focuses on an unnamed speaker who is assumed to be based on Duffy herself. The poet uses a chatty tone and the personal pronoun "you" to speak directly to the reader and to make the poem and the emotions contained within it universal for all readers

**Relationships:** The speaker has a positive relationship with Mrs Tilscher. The speaker feels safe in Mrs Tilscher's class and feels that she makes their time at school enjoyable and entertaining. They feel very close to her throughout the poem but once they are moving on to another school there is a distance appearing between them as Mrs Tilscher refuses to answer their question and turns away. The speaker also shows a negative relationship with the "rough boy" as they react angrily when he tells them the facts of life. This shows their immaturity as they are unable to deal with their emotions and react appropriately when upset.

**Structure:** The poem takes the form of four stanzas. The first two have an even eight lines. They describe the positive atmosphere of the primary school classroom. Stanzas three and four introduce the theme of change and growing up. Each has seven lines, which perhaps reflects the destabilising nature of adolescence. Stanza one introduces an idyllic primary classroom. In stanza two, Duffy continues to portray the same wonderful environment of a classroom, comparing it to a sweetshop. However, she juxtaposes the horrors of the external world (by including the names of Brady and Hindley) with the almost magical descriptions of the classrooms. Duffy introduces a turning point in stanza three. It is a time of growth and new beginnings. The final stanza describes the child's sexual awakening, as she experiences unfamiliar feelings and no longer finds the answers with Mrs Tilscher. Significantly, the poem ends with the speaker leaving the school gates perhaps to embark on the next stage in her life.

**Themes:** Childhood, Growing up, Memory, Identity, Contrast, Isolation

### Quotations

"The laugh of a bell swung by a running child" - personification

"This was better than home." - short sentence/ tone

"The classroom glowed like a sweetshop" - simile

"Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed from commas into exclamation marks." - metaphor

"stared  
at your parents, appalled, when you got back home." - word choice

"That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity." - word choice/ metaphor

"Mrs Tilscher smiles,  
then turned away." - word choice

"the sky split open into a thunderstorm." - metaphor/ word choice/ alliteration

**Links with:** War Photographer, Valentine, Mrs Midas



## In Mrs Tilscher's Class Textual Analysis

*Look at lines 1 – 8 (Stanza 1)*

1. Analyse how Duffy has used language and/ or sentence structure to capture the enjoyment and innocence of the classroom setting. (2 marks)

*(Look at lines 9-16 Stanza 2)*

2. Explain in your own words the extent to which the pupils felt affected by real life events. (2 marks)

*(Look at lines 17-23 Stanza 3)*

3. Analyse how language is used in Stanza 3 to show the naivety of the speaker compared to her peers. (2 marks)
4. Analyse how language is used to capture the idea of change and growing up in Stanza 3.

(2 marks)

*(Look at lines 24-30 Stanza 4)*

5. There is a noticeable change in tone in the final 2 stanzas. Explain fully, using your own words, the difference in children in stanza 4 compared to Stanza 1. In your answer you should refer to ideas presented in *both* these stanzas. (2 marks)

6. By referring to this poem, and at least one other poem by Duffy, explore how Duffy has used language and sentence structure to capture memorable childhood experiences in her poetry. 10 marks



## THE WAY MY MOTHER SPEAKS

Word choice  
confronting,  
love, close  
relationships

Word choice  
presents  
experiences,  
advice

Paradox  
confusion  
advice  
speakers' s  
feelings

Broad words  
slow it down  
like the train  
journey

Emphasises  
the distance  
travelled

Colloquial  
language and  
nocturnal

I say her phrases to myself  
in my head  
or under the shallows of my breath,  
castly shapes moving.  
The day and ever. The day and ever.

Repetition mimics movement of the train,  
emphasises love and how long the negative  
feelings will last, do not want to forget

The train this slow evening  
goes down England  
browsing for the right sky,  
too blue swapped for a cool grey.  
For miles I have been saying  
What like is it  
the way I say things when I think.  
Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.  
What like is it.

Repetition of "nothing" connotations of negative feelings, loss, hostility and  
confusion. Sounds in their head so silent but they can hear there as if they are  
real/overwhelming. Doubt's negative shows a realisation that they do not need to  
abandon mother reluctant to forget their mother and past.

Approach of change: once to something  
permanent, reflects a dialect, contrasts a sense  
of belonging to your roots

First person narration, makes it personal and  
shows the speaker's actions

Metaphor connotations of slowly, long to  
have the better words

Stanza 2 - transition, change is present  
through the symbolism of the last journey

Word choice of "browsing" connotations of  
searching, looking for what they belong "right  
sky" suggests there is a place that looks right  
and suits them

Word choice of "blue" connotations of sun,  
warmth, comfort and happiness. "cool grey"  
connotations of misery and cold, uncertainty.  
Focus on lack of perfection in both places

Highlights the contrasting identities. The way  
the speaker thinks and acts are different. Link  
to roots and background etc.

Stanza 3 - more positive, sense of excitement,  
futureward, experience

Only tonight  
I am happy and sad  
like a child  
who stood at the end of summer  
and dipped a net  
in a green, erotic pond. The day  
and ever. The day and ever.  
I am homesick, free, in love  
with the way my mother speaks.

Word choice  
suggests time  
in a lifetime  
occasionally

Symbolises a  
time of  
change,  
growing up  
and revisiting an

Repetition  
emphasises  
the continuing  
journey and  
constant  
change

List - contradiction of positive and negative,  
more positive as journey ends, moving forward,  
link to past and stay in love with roots and  
memories which will remain with them.

Word choice - contrast/confusion, more confident  
and hopeful for the future. simile - compares the  
speaker to a child, suggests innocence and hope  
as choosing an adulthood, connection to past but  
emotions connect to them in life

Word choice of "dipped" suggests tentativeness,  
cautious approach

Metaphor - links to growing up and a emerging  
sexuality Word choice of "pond" suggests new  
depths to explore, new experiences,  
excitement

Repetition - full circle, return to life, free to  
create own future and remain connected to the  
past, positive love to end

- Novel and metaphorical journey
- Experiences of freedom and marking  
milestones needed to the future and growing  
up
- Connection to mother and positive states  
of identity/hood
- Methods in and the child experiences
- Their journey reflects the journey from  
childhood to adulthood and leaving  
security and warmth behind us
- Emotions are personal and specific

### Themes

- Childhood
- Identity
- Growing up
- Nostalgia
- Relationships
- Emotions

### Links to

- In Mrs Thatcher's Class  
(growing up)
- Originally (identity)
- War Photographer  
(nostalgia)
- Mrs Malin (conflicting  
emotions)
- Victorian (nostalgia)



## The Way My Mother Speaks Notes

**Summary:** In this poem the poet/persona is on a train that "goes down England". The journey is both literal and metaphorical, as here Duffy is concerned with the transition between childhood and adulthood, from dependence to independence, from seeing herself as being closely tied to her mother to then forming her own identity. Like *Originally* and *In Mrs Tilscher's Class*, Duffy explores how change causes conflicting emotions, which is why this poem is full of contradictions and contrasts. The poem's title could imply "the way" her mother speaks in terms of her use of dialect and set expressions, but it might also suggest the manner in which her mother's words come to her – they are bound up with her own thinking and breathing – *they are part of her being*. The poem ends on a note of optimism insisting that you can be "free" but also still connected to your background and family.

**Narration:** First person, from the point of view of a young person leaving home. The character discusses their feelings of moving away as they travel on a train to England. The narrator moves between emotions of fear and confusion to an optimistic tone.

**Relationships:** The poem focuses on the relationship between the speaker, probably Duffy, and their mother. This union between mother and daughter is emphasised by the brevity of the stanza and the inclusion of the two women in it. The next two stanzas then, could represent the 'journey' or the different stages ahead of the speaker in becoming an adult, which she embarks on, equipped with the close connection she had with her mother.

**Structure:** The poem takes the form of an opening five-line stanza followed by two stanzas of nine lines. In the first stanza, she describes repeating her mother's words in her head and under her breath. This suggests that they are bound up with her own self. Duffy also uses rhythm and rhyme throughout this poem to great effect. The repetition of her mother's expressions create the rhythm of the train in each stanza to remind us that she is on a journey. The use of half rhyme "head" and "breath", "think" and "silent" also work to hold each stanza together. There are also stronger rhymes such as "moving" and "evening". These connect the words, in this case implying that this moment in time is one of transition.

**Themes:** Childhood, Family, Memory, Identity, Changes, Isolation

### Quotations

"I say her phrases to myself/ in my head" – word choice

"under the shallows of my breath." – metaphor/word choice

"The day and ever. The day and ever." - repetition

"The train this slow evening/ goes down England." –word choice

"the right sky/ too blue swapped for a cool grey." – contrast/word choice

"Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent." – repetition/word choice

"Only tonight/ I am happy and sad" – contrast/word choice

"Like a child/ who stood at the end of summer." – metaphor

"I am homesick, free, in love with the way my mother speaks" – repetition/word choice

**Links with:** War Photographer, Originally, In Mrs Tilscher's Class



## The Way My Mother Speaks Textual Analysis

1. Look at lines 1-4 ("Built like...trouble.")

By referring to at least two examples of language, explain how the poet creates a clear impression of the cop. **(4 marks)**

2. Look at lines 6-9.

By referring to **at least one** example of language, explain how the poet gives a clear sense of the cop's home life. **(2 marks)**

3. Look at lines 14-16.

By referring to at least one example of language, explain how the poet highlights the threats that the cop faces daily. **(2 marks)**

4. Look at lines 17-18.

How effective do you find these lines as a conclusion to the poem? You should refer to one example from these lines, and to the language and/or ideas from the rest of the poem. **(2 marks)**

5. By referring to this poem, and at least one other by MacCaig, show how he uses setting to explore different themes. **(10 marks)**



Written from the viewpoint of the wife of King Midas. He was granted a wish by Dionysus whereby everything he touched turned to gold.

Peak of Autumn - golden month.

Form - dramatic monologue - 11 stanzas of irregular line length to reflect their unpredictable lives.

Mrs Midas

Creates relaxed domestic scene to start.

Personification of kitchen to create a sense of being alive and homely. Contrast to the life-sapping events taking place in the garden.

Simile - contrast to lifelessness outside. The beginning of the separation between them.

It was late September: I'd just poured a glass of wine, begun to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath gently blanching the windows. So I opened one, then with my fingers wiped the other's glass like a brow. He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

First time we see Mr Midas he is being destructive.

Unsure of what she's seeing and puts it down to visibility - she doesn't understand the situation.

Personification - shows the dark nature of the garden and suggests something is going wrong.

Casual action by Mr Midas - doesn't think anything will happen.

Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky, but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked a pear from a branch - we grew Fondante d'Automne - and it sat in his palm like a light bulb. On.

Parenthesis adds extra information about their normal life together and the idea that they grew/created something - contrast to later.

Simile - shape and brightness of the pear. Full stops add comedic effect - reflects her shock and disbelief.

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

Whimsical and humorous imagery contrasts with seriousness of what's just happened.

Two short sentences show how quickly he changed things.

He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed. He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready.

A meeting in Calais between Kings of England and France - both built lavish palaces embellished with golden cloth.

Simile - has the power of a king but can't control it. "Burnished" - polished.

He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne. The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said, What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

He realises the power he's been given and doesn't know how to cope.

Question shows Mrs Midas can't understand and they find it humorous - contrast to later.

I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob. Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich. He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks. He asked where was the wine. I poured with shaking hand,

Tries to inject a sense of normality by using a matter of fact tone.

List shows how many things he was turning - even simple act of dining became difficult.

a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

Metaphor - the corn has turned to gold - adds to comical tone.

Tone has become negative.

Alliteration/list - to show quick progression of the object transforming - harsh sound of "g" highlights seriousness of "gift".

It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees. After we had both calmed down, I finished the wine on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself. I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.

Word choice - connotations of fear, uncertainty - starting to become anxious - not so funny anymore.

Short sentences show the extent to which she had to change things - joke about toilet to soften tone.

The toilet I didn't mind. I couldn't believe my ears: how he'd had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted. But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?

Pause to reflect her shock.

Emphasises the clear change in relationship and start of separation - loss of touch/intimacy.

Pun - everyone makes wishes but her "fool" of a husband had to be the one who had his wish granted.

It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced, as the blue flame played on its luscious stem. At least. I said, you'll be able to give up smoking for good.

Short sentence to show how bitter she is about it.

She mocks him as she is annoyed by his foolish choices - they gain nothing from this "gift".

Injects some humour into the shocking situation.

Word choice - connotations of gold.

Enjambment allows pause to reflect on what's happening.



Stanza 7 begins to show the damage done to their relationship. Short sentence to show abrupt change/separation.

Simile - compares undressing each other to opening a gift or something that is anticipated greatly. - contrast to their new relationship.

Usually has a positive meaning - associated with kindness/empathy - physically impossible to live with a gold heart.

Image turns disturbing as we picture the dead eyes of the child - simile.

Short sentence - blunt dismissal of her husband.

Creates suspense and suggests something is to be feared.

He's in a sorrowful state and is beginning to lose his mind. Pan is God of shepherds and flocks, was isolated from other gods. He's part of the wilderness now.

Duffy encourages us to consider the effect of Midas's story on his wife. Not only hurting him. Explores the selfish nature of relationships.

She uses a list to show Mrs Midas remembering their once full relationship and mourns the loss of the physical part. Repetition of "hands" emphasises that his touch and their intimacy is now lost to her - unlike human contact, gold is cold and hard.

Mrs Midas is now afraid of her husband - tone has become more serious.

Word choice - connotations of turning to stone - like he is doing - she worries if it will happen to her.

Associated with the dead - their relationship is dead.

A time that was idyllically happy and peaceful.

Reference to gold.

Separate beds. In fact, I put a chair against my door, near petrified. He was below, turning the spare room into the tomb of Tutankhamun. You see, we were passionate then, in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly, like presents, fast food. But now I feared his honeyed embrace, the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.

Art is something to be admired yet never changed or touched - forever frozen. Effect of his touch on her.

And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live with a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I bore his child, its perfect one limbs, its little tongue like a precious latch, its amber eyes holding their pupils like flies. My dream-milk burned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun.

Dreams of their golden child - mainly positive yet lifeless description. "ore" and "amber" link to gold.

Milk will only ever remain a dream as she can't bear his child - alliteration of harsh sounds to show the pain she feels at this loss.

Rude awakening.

So he had to move out. We'd a caravan in the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him up under cover of dark. He sat in the back. And then I came home, the women who married the fool who wished for gold. At first I visited, odd times, parking the car a good way off, then walking.

Tries to hide him from others as she's ashamed of what he's become and what he's made her.

Beginning to detach herself - no regular visits.

Alliteration to draw attention to the damage he's causing.

You knew you were getting close. Golden trout on the grass. One day, a hare hung from a larch, a beautiful lemon mistake. And then his footprints, glistening next to the river's path. He was thin, delicious; hearing, he said, the music of Pan from the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.

Short sentence to show how abruptly she decided to cut him out of her life.

Short sentence shows how bitter she is about his blatant disregard for her feelings.

What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I sold the contents of the house and came down here. I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon, and once a bowl of apples stopped me dead. I miss most, even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch.

Despite unleashing all her anger and separating herself she can't help dwelling on what she's lost and how little she has.

Carol Ann Duffy

#### Themes

- Love
- Loss
- Relationships



## Mrs Midas Notes

**Summary:** Mrs Midas is a poem written from the viewpoint of the wife of the mythological King Midas, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. King Midas was granted a wish by the god Dionysus whereby everything he touched would turn to gold. With comical undertones, a wide range of emotions is expressed through the persona of Mrs Midas as she speaks out against her husband's foolish actions and gradually separates herself from him. She leaves him to waste away in isolation while she laments the loss of their physical relationship and the chance to have a baby together to fulfil their dreams.

**Narration:** First person, created the speaker of Mrs Midas who is telling the story of what happened when her husband started turning everything gold. She makes it chatty and conversational as if she is speaking directly to us which makes us more engaged and feel greater sympathy.

**Relationships:** Mixed emotions towards her husband she goes through various stages from confusion, to shock to anger and fear. By the end she is angry that he has ruined their marriage and believes his wish was selfish but she misses him and cannot forget the good parts about their relationship and marriage. She regrets that she has lost the passion in her life.

**Structure:** This poem is written in the form of a dramatic monologue from a female perspective. Duffy focuses on an aspect of this well-known character King Midas and presents an imaginary response from his wife's viewpoint, providing fresh, thought-provoking and comical insight into their lives.

Mrs Midas is made up of eleven stanzas of irregular line length, ranging from six to ten lines to reflect how unpredictable and chaotic life has become for this couple in that at any second, with a simple touch, Mrs Midas could be turned to gold. Stanzas one to six deal with the discovery of King Midas' granted wish, and the sheer panic at the realisation and of the tremendous power he has been given. At the same time, a comic tone is maintained throughout, as Mrs Midas even catalogues everyday items being turned to gold. The remainder of the poem reveals the harsh heartfelt implications of Midas' gift, highlighting the damage it has done to the couple's relationship and their future together. The final line in the poem sums up Mrs Midas' regret at the loss of physical contact with her isolated husband.

**Themes:** Destruction, Love, Hate, Greed, Consequences, Isolation

### Quotations

"the dark ground seems to drink the light of the sky" – personification/word choice

"he plucked a pear from a branch...it sat in his palm like a light bulb. On." – word choice/short sentence

"he was spitting out the teeth of the rich." -metaphor

"I made him sit  
on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself." - word choice

"Separate beds. In fact, I put a chair against my door,  
near petrified." – short sentence/word choice

"we were passionate then, in those halcyon days, unwrapping each other, rapidly,  
like presents" – word choice

"What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed  
but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness." - short sentence/word choice

"I miss most,  
even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch." - list

**Links with:** Valentine, War Photographer



## Mrs Midas Textual Analysis

1. The mood/scene in the first stanza is clearly presented

a) Identify the mood/scene established 1 mark

b) Identify one example of word choice that exemplifies this mood 1 mark

c) Referring to the poet's use of language in the first stanza, show how Duffy develops this idea for the reader 2 marks

2. "It was then I started to scream". What, in stanza four, might cause Mrs Midas to scream? 2 marks

3. The poet uses humour and horror to express the central ideas. How effective do you find the language in developing both ideas?

Your answer should deal with both humour and horror

You may deal with ideas and/or language. 4 marks

4. In "Mrs Midas" Duffy uses the dramatic monologue form to explore the breakdown of a relationship. Explore the effectiveness of this technique in the poem and in at least one other poem by Duffy. 10 marks



## How to answer the 10 mark Q...

### Use the headings:

- **General Comment (2 marks)**
- **Exam poem (2 marks)**
- **Other poem (6 marks)**

### General Comment

- Write a sentence for each poem to show how it ties in with the question.

### Exam poem

- Quote a relevant example from your exam poem.
- Pick out the techniques used in the quote.
- Explain what they show us and link this back to what the question is asking.
- Do exactly the same again using another quotation from this poem.

### Other Poems

- Do exactly the same as the Exam poem but do it six times.
- You can focus on one or two other poems.

**NOTE: Remember to always link back to the question at the end of each bullet point.**

### Example:

### Question

- Discuss how the poet uses **striking words and imagery** to explore a **deeper theme** in "In Mrs Tilscher's Class" and at least 1 other Duffy poem.

### General Comment

- In "In Mrs Tilscher's Class", Duffy uses striking imagery such as the comparison of the children to tadpoles and the personification of the bell to illustrate the theme of growing up



- In "War Photographer", Duffy uses the description of the war zone and the memory of the man dying to illustrate the theme of the horror of war
- In "Valentine", Duffy uses the imagery of the onion as a symbol of the good and bad side of love to highlight the theme of love.

Exam Poem

**"inky tadpoles changed from commas into exclamation marks"**

- *This metaphor compares the children to tadpoles/frogs and shows how they change as they grow up. Just as a tadpole develops into a frog and changes its appearance so too the children develop physically and mentally as they grow up. The creates the effect of emphasising how the children change as they develop through childhood. This illustrates the theme of growing up as it clearly emphasises the changes the children go through and how they become more complex and developed as they become older.*

**"the air tasted of electricity."**

- *This metaphor compares .....to ..... and shows ..... Just as a ..... so too ..... The creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises .....*

Other poems

**"half formed ghost"**

- *This metaphor compares .....to ..... and shows ..... Just as a ..... so too ..... The creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it .....*



clearly emphasises

**“running children in a nightmare heat”**

- This metaphor compares .....to ..... and shows ..... Just as a ..... so too ..... The creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises

**“spools of suffering”**

- This striking word choice of tells the reader ..... The word choice of “.....” suggests..... The use of alliteration creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises

**“Not a red rose or a satin heart”**

- This striking word choice of tells the reader ..... The word choice of “.....” suggests..... The use of alliteration creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises

**“it will blind you with tears like a lover”**

- This simile compares .....to ..... and shows ..... Just as a ..... so too



..... The creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises

.....  
**“It is a moon wrapped in brown paper”**

- This metaphor compares ..... to ..... and shows ..... Just as a ..... so too

..... The creates the effect of ..... This illustrates the theme of ..... as it clearly emphasises

### Analysing a Quotation

- Look for any techniques like similes, metaphor, alliteration etc.
- Explain what the writer tells us in this quotation
- Describe how it helps prove your point and help you answer the question.
- Pick out any specific words from the quotation that stand out and explain what they mean
- Be as detailed as possible

#### EXAMPLE

1. “the sky split open into a thunderstorm.”  
This metaphor compares the future and dramatic feelings associated with leaving school to a thunderstorm. Just as a thunderstorm is electric and dangerous so too the future for the speaker could be both exciting and risky as she does not know what will happen next. The word choice of “sky split” suggests that the sky is broken and has been ripped apart in a violent action. This connects to the speaker’s experience as there life has been changed as they have grown and their innocence has been destroyed, just like the sky. This image reinforces the idea that the speaker cannot return to their past and the experiences of early childhood.
2. “I give you an onion. It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.” - metaphor
3. “It will blind you with tears like a lover.” - simile
4. “Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips possessive and faithful” – word choice
5. “to fields which don’t explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat.” – word choice



6. "a half-formed ghost" - metaphor
7. "A hundred agonies in black and white from which his editor will pick out fix or six" – hyperbole/word choice
8. "the dark ground seems to drink the light of the sky" – personification/word choice
9. "he plucked a pear from a branch... it sat in his palm like a light bulb. On." – word choice/short sentence
10. "he was spitting out the teeth of the rich." -metaphor
11. "I made him sit on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself." - word choice
12. "The laugh of a bell swung by a running child" - personification
13. "This was better than home." – short sentence/tone
14. "The classroom glowed like a sweetshop" – simile
15. "the miles rushed back to the city, the street, the house, the vacant rooms" - list
16. "I stared at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw." – metaphor/word choice
17. "All childhood is an emigration" – metaphor