MAKING THE LEAP: FROM GCSE TO A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

TRANSITION LEARNING PACK
HOW THIS PACK WORKS

The activities within this pack build on the virtual transition day lesson, where we were thinking about the ways in which literature, and poetry in particular responds to real-life issues, such as racism.

You'll find that the activities are divided into three sections:

SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

These are the tasks that you must do as a minimum prior to starting. They essentially require you to apply the skills and knowledge you acquired at GCSE to three poems from the anthology of 21st century poems that we study on the A-Level.

Once you’ve completed them, you should have a reasonable understanding of what each poem is about and the kinds of ideas it’s exploring. You should also have a sense of how the poet’s use of language, form, and structure are reinforcing these ideas.

SECTION 2: CORE TASKS

The tasks in this section encourage you to take what you’ve learned further, by getting you to think comparatively about the poems.

Again, this is something you’ve done at GCSE, so it shouldn’t be too intimidating or too difficult for you to do.

SECTION 3: MASTERY TASKS

The tasks in this section are intended to push you that little bit further, in the sense that they ask you to consider a fourth ‘unseen’ poem, and to think about the ways in which it’s similar or different to the three we’ve helped you with.

This is obviously similar to the sort of thing you’d have been asked to do at GCSE – in the sense that there was an unseen poetry question – so again, we’re hoping that you’ll be brave and attempt this to show commitment to the course!

HOW LONG SHOULD THIS TAKE ME?

The compulsory tasks should take you roughly 8 hours to complete, the core tasks should take an additional 4 hours, and the mastery tasks should take an additional 3 hours, making 15 hours in total.

This is the amount of independent study we’d recommend you do per subject per week at A-Level to get an A* or an A, so although it’s not compulsory, it is something we’d encourage you to have a go at now, especially given that Year 11 got cut short.

HOW WILL THIS HELP ME?

The activities in this booklet are designed to develop your analytical skills. This is an important skill for success in a range of sectors – whether you’re analysing a tricky scientific problem, or legal problem, or social problem, or business problem etc.

It will also develop your general knowledge in terms of history, geography, and politics, and will mean you’ve already covered 3 of the poems you’ll need to know for your exam!
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

Spend half an hour reading and re-reading the following poem, which describes the experience of refugees arriving in Britain. Use the questions on the right-hand side to help you get to grips with what it’s talking about in each stanza.

If something is ‘stowed’ it is hidden. If they’re stowed ‘in the sea’ what does that suggest about the quality of the boat they’re in?
The word ‘alfresco’ means fresh air, but what does the air they’re breathing smell of?
What are their mouths full of?
What are the tourists doing while this is going on?

‘Blarney’ is another word for language, and if you’re ‘ vexed’ it means you’re annoyed, so what do you think the seagulls are doing to the refugees as they ‘huddle’ on the sand?
What’s else is happening to them in terms of the weather?
What mode of transport carries them away?

‘Reaping’ refers to farming/gathering crops; is it common for refugees to undertake farm-work do you think? And if so, why?
What do you think it means when it says ‘unclocked by the national eye’?
What about when it says ‘stabs in the back’ – what do you think they’re afraid of?

‘Grafting’ refers to working; what do you think they’re referring to when they talk about ‘grafting in the black’?
If you’re ‘banking on’ something, it means you’re hoping for it – what do you think they’re hoping for here?
A ‘passport’ is the thing that allows you to travel, but it’s also the thing that allows you to remain in a country – with that in mind, what do you think they’re saying when they say they want to be ‘passported to life’?

When they say ‘imagine’ them and their loved ones ‘Blair’d in the cash of [their] beeswax’d cars’ what do you think they’re wishing for when it comes to their future?
When you ‘raise your glasses’ it suggests you’re wishing someone well – who are they sending best wishes to if they’re raising their glasses ‘east’?

When they talk about the ‘chalk of Britannia’, they’re probably talking about the white cliffs of Dover – if they’re ‘flecked by the chalk’ it suggests that it’s rubbed off on them; what could this be a metaphor for?
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

Now try to put what you’ve learned into full sentences by filling in the sections below. If you have a printer, you might want to print the booklet and do this by hand. If not, you have two options, you can either type your answers in, or you can make notes on lined paper. Either way, it should take roughly half an hour.

In the first stanza, the poet describes the struggles of the journey, which include...

Stowed in the sea to invade
the alfresco lash of a diesel-breeze
ratcheting speed into the tide, brunt with
gobfuls of surf phlegmed by cushy come-and-go
tourists prow’d on the cruisers, lording the ministered waves.

In the second stanza the poet describes the immediate issues the refugees face on arrival, which include...

Seagull and shoal life
vexing their blarnies upon our huddled
camouflage past the vast crumble of scummed
cliffs, scrambling on mulch as thunder unbladders
yobbish rain and wind on our escape hutch’d in a Bedford van.

The third stanza describes the struggles that follow in the months and years thereafter, which include...

Seasons or years we reap
inland, unclocked by the national eye
or stab in the back, teemed for breathing
sweeps of grass through the whistling asthma of parks,
burdened, ennobled – poling sparks across pylon and pylon.

The fourth stanza starts to hint at the things they long for or dream of, which include...

Swarms of us, grafting in
the black within shot of the moon’s
highlight, banking on the miracle of sun –
span its rainbow, passport us to life. Only then
can it be human to hoick ourselves, bare-faced for the clear.

The fifth stanza continues this idea, by asking us to imagine a future in which they’re...

Imagine my love and I,
our sundry others, Blair’d in the cash
of our beeswax’d cars, our crash clothes, free,
we raise our charged glasses over unparasol’d tables
East, babbling our lingoës, flecked by the chalk of Britannia!

Overall then, this is a poem that seems to explore...
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

Hopefully you’re starting to get a bit more of a sense now of what this poem’s about, and how it’s kind of saying that, on the one hand, life as a refugee is incredibly tough, but, on the other, the rewards justify the risk.

What we want you to do now is think about how the language, form, and structure reinforce this.

To start with we want you to spend 5 minutes looking at stanza one: what techniques do you notice? Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Stowed in the sea to invade
the alfresco lash of a diesel-breeze
ratcheting speed into the tide, brunt with
gobfuls of surf phlegmed by cushy come-and-go
tourists prow’d on the cruisers, looting the ministered waves.

Now spend 10 minutes reading through what we found and either adding to your notes or highlighting our key points.

The first technique we noticed was the alliteration in line 1. We call this sibilant alliteration, because the letter sound being repeated is an ‘s’ sound, but what is it’s function?

Alliteration is often used to emphasise certain words. In this case the two words being emphasised are ‘stowed’ and ‘sea’.

If you look back at the initial prompts we gave you, you’ll see that when something is ‘stowed’ it’s hidden, but if you’re hidden ‘in the sea’ then that suggests that you are drowning, and therefore the alliteration is emphasising the danger the refugees are in, and introducing a sense of jeopardy.

If you look at photographs of refugees in newspapers and/or read the articles that go with them, it’s clear that the risk of drowning comes from the quality of the boats they’re travelling in, which are often shallow or in poor repair.

The next thing we noticed was the violence of the verb ‘invade’ and the fact that it was placed at the end of a line, which enjambs or runs over onto the next line.

If we imagine the alternatives it probably wouldn’t seem as shocking. If, for example, it had said ‘Stowed in the sea to invade the alfresco lash of a diesel breeze’ all on one line, the word ‘invade’ would be buried in the middle of the line and wouldn’t seem as violent.

But by placing the word at the end of a line and starting a new line immediately after, it’s almost as though the line has been cut off prematurely, as though the line has been attacked, which is what happens in an invasion. So the abrupt end to the line reinforces the sense of danger that had already been introduced by the words ‘stowed in the sea’. As a result, the refugees seem doubly endangered, and the poem becomes more tense.

This tension is arguably reinforced by the word ‘lash’ in the second line, which has connotations of slavery in the sense that someone might talk about giving their slave ‘forty lashes’ for example, or forty strokes of the whip.

Here the word’s used to describe the breeze, as though the wind is whipping their faces. This is something we can all probably relate to to a certain extent – in the sense that most of us will have experienced a wind that’s almost so cold that it stings, and so most of us will be able to sympathise with the idea that the wind is stinging their faces, and making the journey even more painful and unpleasant.

However, the fact that the breeze is also filled with ‘diesel’ makes it sound even more dangerous and even more painful. Again, if you read about the boats refugees come across in, you’ll find that they often leak diesel, so this is based on facts. But the juxtaposition of the word ‘diesel’ with the word ‘alfresco’ which refers to fresh air creates a jarring contrast and tells us things are not as they should be, creating sympathy again.

Looking at the remaining lines, we were struck by even more violent verbs like ‘ratcheting’ and ‘phlegmed’, as well as words like ‘gobfuls’, which sound coarse and unpleasant, like they’re being spat at by the tourists, whose lives are ‘cushy’ compared to the lives of these refugees.
The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

With what you’ve just read through in mind, spend 15 minutes looking at stanza two: what techniques do you notice, and what effect do you think they have?

Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting a text box if you haven’t, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Seagull and shoal life
vexing their blarnies upon our huddled
camouflage past the vast crumble of scummed
cliffs, scamming on mulch as thunder unbladders
yobbish rain and wind on our escape hutch’d in a Bedford van.

You might want to look at things like the violent verbs, the adjectives that describe the refugees, the adjectives that describe the cliffs, the personification of the weather – also known as pathetic fallacy – and the metaphor of them being ‘hutch’d’ in a Bedford van.

As a stretch you might want to think about which letter sounds are being repeated, and whether they’re hard consonants like ‘c/k/ck/d/t/p/b’ or soft consonants like ‘sh/ph/f/m/l’ etc. But if you do this, make sure you ask yourself what it’s adding in terms of effect.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

With what you’ve just read through in mind, spend 15 minutes looking at stanza three: what techniques do you notice, and what effect do you think they have?

Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting a text box if you haven’t, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Seasons or years we reap
inland, unclocked by the national eye
or stabs in the back, teemed for breathing
sweeps of grass through the whistling asthma of parks,
burdened, ennobled – poling sparks across pylon and pylon.

Again, you might want to look at things like the violent verbs, the personification of the government, the references to illness and disease that are juxtaposed with images to do with nature, and the references to electricity and explosions.

And again, as a stretch you might want to think about which letter sounds are being repeated, but you also might want to think about things like caesura and enjambment and what that does to the rhythm of the line, as well as how that links to the overall mood/message of this stanza.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

With what you’ve just read through in mind, spend 15 minutes looking at stanza four: what techniques do you notice, and what effect do you think they have?

Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting a text box if you haven’t, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Swarms of us, grafting in
the black within shot of the moon’s
spotlight, banking on the miracle of sun –
span its rainbow, passport us to life. Only then
can it be human to hoick ourselves, bare-faced for the clear.

Here you might want to think about the metaphor that’s being used when they refer to themselves as a “swarm”. You might also want to think about the listing of verbs, and what the effect of this is. And you might want to think about the antithesis that’s created by juxtaposing references to darkness with references to light.

Again, as a stretch, you might want to think about things like letter sounds, caesura, and enjambment, but you might also want to look at things like the internal rhyme in lines 2 and 3 where the ‘spot’ of ‘spotlight’ echoes the word ‘shot’ in the previous line – what effect does that have when you run those ideas together – i.e. ‘within shot of the [...] spotlight’?
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

With what you’ve just read through in mind, spend **15 minutes** looking at stanza five: what techniques do you notice, and what effect do you think they have?

Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting a text box if you haven’t, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Imagine my love and I,
our sundry others, Blair’d in the cash
of our beeswax’d cars, our crash clothes, free,
we raise our charged glasses over unparasol’d tables
East, babbling our lingo’s, flecked by the chalk of Britannia!

*Here you might want to consider the fact that this stanza starts with an imperative verb – what does that suggest about how the speaker sees themselves now as compared to at the start of the poem? You might also want to think about the references to material wealth, the adjective at the end of line 3, and the metaphor of being ‘flecked by the chalk of Britannia’. As a stretch, you might also want to think about why he’s changed the spelling of the word ‘blared’ to ‘Blair’d’ with a capital ‘B’, and why he cuts line 4 off after ‘tables’ so that ‘East’ appears at the start of the next line.*
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 1: ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’

You should, by now, have spent an hour and 15 minutes reading, understanding, and analysing this poem. For the final 15 minutes then, we want you to think about form and whole-text structure.

Again, you can make notes by hand if you’ve printed the booklet out, or you can insert a text box and make notes electronically, or you can make notes on lined paper if you’ve been doing it that way.

If you look at the shape of each stanza, you’ll see that each line is slightly longer than the previous one, creating a ragged right-hand margin.

What kind of mood or atmosphere does this create, and how does it link to the experience of the refugees?

If you look at the shape of the poem as a whole, you’ll see that the line lengths fluctuate from short to long and back again, five times.

Does this pushing and pulling or ebbing and flowing remind you of anything that’s described in the poem/anything to do with the refugees’ experience?

Try to explain what you think the poet might be trying to achieve/emphasise by doing this.

Structurally, the first four stanzas focus on struggles – the struggle of the journey, followed by arrival, followed by months and years of hard work - but the final stanza focuses on optimism for the future.

What do you think the poet might have been trying to say by having four negative stanzas rather than, say, making it half and half?

And why do you think they might have chosen to end on a positive rather than another negative?
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Spend half an hour reading and re-reading the following poem, which explores what happens to unwanted girl children in India.

Use the questions on the right-hand side to help you get to grips with what it’s talking about in each stanza.

Our Lady of the Light Convent, Kerala

The sister here is telling my mother
How she came to collect children
Because they were crippled or dark or girls.

Found naked in the streets,
Covered in garbage, stuffed in bags,
Abandoned at their doorstep.

One of them was dug up by a dog,
Thinking the head barely poking above the ground
Was bone or wood, something to chew.

This is the one my mother will bring.

* * *

Milwaukee Airport, USA

The parents wait at the gates.
They are American so they know about ceremony
And tradition, about doing things right.

They haven’t seen or touched her yet.
Don’t know of her fetish for plucking hair off hands,
Or how her mother tried to bury her.

But they are crying.
*We couldn’t stop crying,* my mother said,
Feeling the strangeness of her empty arms.

* * *

This girl grows up on video tapes,
Sees how she’s passed from woman
To woman. She returns to twilight corners.

To the day of her birth,
How it happens in some desolate hut
Outside village boundaries

Where mothers go to squeeze out life,
Watch body slither out from body,

Feel for penis or no penis,
Toss the baby to the heap of others,
Trudge home to lie down for their men again.

This section is set in a ‘convent’ in ‘Kerala’, which is a place in Southern India. A convent is a place where nuns live, and nuns tend to refer to one another as ‘Sister’ – for example ‘Sister Mary’ or ‘Sister Ruth’.

In this section, the ‘sister’ is telling the speaker’s mother about how she ended up ‘collecting children’ – but what kind of children were they, where did she find them, what kind of conditions were they in, and what do you think their parents were hoping would happen to them?

The poem then zooms in on one child in particular – what had the parents done to them, how did the sister end up finding them, and what does the speaker’s mother decide to do with the child?

This section is set in America, where the speaker’s mother is met by two people she describes as ‘the parents’ – what do you think ‘the parents’ are going to do to the child that the speaker’s mother has brought?

What challenges are they going to face once they get this little girl home? In other words, what habits does she have that they don’t know about, and what don’t they know about her past?

We’re then told that ‘the parents’ and the speaker’s mother were all ‘crying’ – why do you think ‘the parents’ were crying, and why do you think the speaker’s mother was crying?

It’s not clear where the third section is set.

However, at the start we’re told that the girl ‘grows up on video tapes’ and ‘sees how she’s passed from woman to woman’ – which women has she been passed to and from, and who might have recorded this happening?

We’re told that, by watching these video tapes, she’s taken back ‘to the day of her birth’, and to the place of her birth – what do the conditions sound like to you? Do you think her family were poor or rich?

We’re also told that it wasn’t just her mother who gave birth in these conditions, but many mothers, who, after giving birth, ‘feel for penis or no penis’ and who ‘toss the baby’ on a ‘heap’ if there isn’t a penis – why would they want boys rather than girls?
POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

The first section of the poem is set in…

The speaker suggests that their mother went there to collect a baby from one of the nuns there, with the intention of taking it to…

While she’s there, the nun tells her about the kinds of things the children there have experienced, which include...

However, the child that the speaker’s mother decides to take has had the most shocking past because...

The second section of the poem is set in...

The speaker tells us that this was the place where the child her mother had brought back with her from India was handed over to...

All three adults are in tears, but for different reasons – the speaker’s mother is in tears because...

...whereas the other two are in tears because...

However, things are likely to get much tougher for them once they get the child home because...

In the third section, we’re told that, as the child grew up she learned more and more about her past by...

We’re told that this includes learning more about where she was born, and how common it was for the mothers there to...

This may be because...

And/or because...
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Hopefully you’re starting to get a bit more of a sense now of what this poem’s about, and how sad it is to think that, because of poverty and old-fashioned ideas about gender in India, girl children are regularly left for dead.

What we want you to do now is think about how the language, form, and structure reinforce this.

To start with we want you to spend 15 minutes looking at the first section: what techniques do you notice? Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

Our Lady of the Light Convent, Kerala

The sister here is telling my mother
How she came to collect children
Because they were crippled or dark or girls.

Found naked in the streets,
Covered in garbage, stuffed in bags,
Abandoned at their doorstep.

One of them was dug up by a dog,
Thinking the head barely poking above the ground
Was bone or wood, something to chew.

This is the one my mother will bring.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Now spend 15 minutes reading through the things we noticed and either adding to your notes if you did them on lined paper, or by highlighting key things if you printed the booklet or are working on it electronically.

We actually found it really hard to spot any techniques in the first stanza because it seems so matter-of-fact, but actually that’s a technique in and of itself in the sense that it’s called a declarative sentence. But what is its effect?

Well, for us, it makes the whole thing seem very factual and, as a result, very emotionally detached, which is kind of weird when you think about what it’s actually saying, which is that a number of nuns in Southern India end up ‘collecting children / Because they [are] crippled or dark or girls’.

When we copied that line out, other things about it started to jump out at us – for example the verb ‘collecting’, as this is something that usually refers to inanimate things – like stamps for example or rare antiques – but here it’s being used to describe children. As a result, it’s kind of dehumanising those children, and making them seem like commodities – things to be bought or traded by childless couples in America.

But this isn’t the only shocking thing in that first stanza, the other shocking thing – in our opinion – is the list of three adjectives at the end because this suggests that being ‘dark’ or being a ‘girl’ is the same as being ‘crippled’. In other words, that being dark-skinned, or female, or both is a disability in India, which limits your chances in life.

The second stanza was a little bit easier in our opinion – the adjective ‘naked’ for example, conveys the children’s vulnerability, creating even more sympathy for them, especially as it’s juxtaposed with the reference to ‘the streets’. This is jarring because being naked is something that most people reserve for private spaces, like their bathrooms or bedrooms, but the street is a public place, making them seem at risk.

The list of verbs that follows emphasises the danger they’re in, as we’re told that they’re ‘covered’ in garbage, ‘stuffed’ in bags, and ‘abandoned’ on doorsteps. These verbs pick up on the images of ‘garbage’ and ‘bags’, which people generally leave just outside their doors, and, combined, suggests that these children are treated like rubbish – and disposed of, like household waste. This is a heart-breaking image, and again, it’s one that dehumanises the children, creating even more sympathy for them.

In the third stanza, you might have noticed the alliteration, which draws attention to the fact that one child was ‘dug up by a dog’. These hard consonants emphasise the violence of the digging and the danger that the child must therefore have been in.

This creates sympathy, but this sympathy intensifies in the next line when we’re told ‘the head was barely poking above the ground’. By using the adverb ‘barely’ the poet suggests the baby was nearly buried completely, meaning that the parents had tried but failed to bury their baby alive.

This is totally harrowing, but it’s even more harrowing when you look at the metaphors being used in the next line, where we’re told that the dog thought a baby’s head was a ‘bone’ or some ‘wood’ that it could then ‘chew’. Not only does this dehumanise this baby further, but it also conjures a really horrific image.

And the fact that the next stanza’s only one line long, means that we don’t really get given much distraction from that image, so it’s left almost to haunt us.

This, and the fact that the baby’s referred to as ‘the one’ rather than ‘the baby’ or ‘the child’ or ‘the girl’ or ‘the little girl’ again creates sympathy for the baby and for the other children like her who’ve been treated like dirt by almost everyone apart from the nun and the speaker’s mother.

And the section break gives us time to really reflect on how awful that is.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Now that you’ve seen the kinds of thing that we found in the first section, spend 20-25 mins looking at the second section and noting down (a) the techniques you notice and (b) the effect you think these have.

Like before, you can either make notes by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or you can insert text boxes if you’d prefer, or you can make notes on lined paper if you’ve been doing it that way.

Milwaukee Airport, USA

The parents wait at the gates.
They are American so they know about ceremony
And tradition, about doing things right.

They haven’t seen or touched her yet.
Don’t know of her fetish for plucking hair off hands,
Or how her mother tried to bury her.

But they are crying.
*We couldn’t stop crying*, my mother said,
Feeling the strangeness of her empty arms.

*
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Now that you’ve seen the kinds of thing that we found in the first section, spend 20-25 mins looking at the third section and noting down (a) the techniques you notice and (b) the effect you think these have.

Like before, you can either make notes by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or you can insert text boxes if you’d prefer, or you can make notes on lined paper if you’ve been doing it that way.

This girl grows up on video tapes,
Sees how she’s passed from woman
To woman. She returns to twilight corners.

To the day of her birth,
How it happens in some desolate hut
Outside village boundaries

Where mothers go to squeeze out life,
Watch body slither out from body,
Feel for penis or no penis,
Toss the baby to the heap of others,

Trudge home to lie down for their men again.
The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2 1/2 hours per poem.

POEM 2: ‘The Deliverer’

Finally, spend 10 minutes or so just thinking and making notes about the overall poem’s form and structure.

As we’ve already pointed out, the first section of this poem is set in India, and the second is set in America, but there’s no indication of where the third section is set.

What do you make of this? Can you infer where the third section is set? Do you think it doesn’t specify a location because it deals with more than one, or do you think there’s a different reason? Elaborate below.

If you look at the way each section’s divided into stanzas, you’ll see that the first one’s divided into three tercets, followed by a single-line stanza; the second is divided into three perfect tercets; and the third is divided into two tercets, two couplets, and a single-lined stanza at the end.

What do you make of this? Why do you think the second stanza might be the most ‘perfect’ in terms of form? And why do you think the third is the most fragmented?

Finally, if we look at the line length, it’s clear from the fact that some lines are notably longer than others that it’s written in free verse.

As a result, we’re looking at a poem with no regular end-rhyme and no regular rhythm, making it sound more like natural speech. It also means that the poet’s made a conscious choice about which words she wants to end each line on, and which sentences she wants to enjamb and which she doesn’t.

Note down (a) why you think she might want the poem to sound like natural speech, (b) what you notice about the words she chooses to end lines on, and (c) which sentences she chooses to enjamb/which she chooses to end-stop.
POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Spend half an hour reading and re-reading the following poem, which describes an event that took place in Italy during WW2, when Italy, like Germany, was ruled by a fascist leader who demonised Jews.

Use the questions on the right-hand side to help you get to grips with what it’s talking about in each stanza.

My Uncle Giuseppe told me
that in Sicily in World War Two,
in the courtyard behind the aquarium,
where the bougainvillea grows so well,
the only captive mermaid in the world
was butchered on the dry and dusty ground
by a doctor, a fishmonger, and certain others.

She, it, had never learned to speak
because she was simple, or so they’d said.
But the priest who held one of her hands
while her throat was cut,
said she was only a fish, and fish can’t speak.
But she screamed like a woman in terrible fear.

And when they took a ripe golden roe
from her side, the doctor said
this was proof she was just a fish
and anyway an egg is not a child,
but refused when some was offered to him.

Then they put her head and her hands
in a box for burial
and someone tried to take her wedding ring,
but the others stopped him,
and the ring stayed put.

The rest they cooked and fed to the troops.
They said a large fish had been found on the beach.

Starvation forgives men many things,
my uncle, the aquarium keeper, said,
but couldn’t look me in the eye,
for which I thank God.

At the start of the poem we’re told that the action’s
set in Sicily, in a courtyard behind an aquarium,
where a plant called bougainvillea’s covered in
flowers - how do you feel then, as a reader, when
you hear that this was the scene of a mermaid
being butchered?

Would you feel this more or less intensely if, rather
than a ‘mermaid’ it had said that a ‘captive girl’ or
a ‘captive woman’ had been ‘butchered’?

Who does it say was responsible for the
‘butchering’ and what’s potentially odd about this?

In the second stanza the speaker seems confused –
on the one hand, they’ve been told that the
‘mermaid’ is ‘only a fish’, but, on the other hand,
they’ve heard her ‘scream like a woman in terrible
fear’ – what do you make of this? Is something
‘fishy’ going on…?! Which of the two seems more
likely? That this was done to a woman or that it
was done to a mermaid?

And, if the mermaid thing’s a lie, what do you
make of a ‘priest’ going along with that, at the
same time as he’s ‘holding her hand’?

In the third stanza, we’re told that a ‘doctor’ also
said that the victim was ‘just a fish’ because her
belly contained ‘a ripe golden roe’, which is what
fish ‘eggs’ are called. However, he then ‘refuses’ to
eat some when it’s ‘offered to him’, even though
fish eggs are a delicacy, also known as caviar.

What do you make of this? Are you convinced by
the doctor’s claims? Should doctors lie?

In the fourth stanza, we’re told ‘someone tried to
take her wedding ring’ before they ‘put her head
and her hands / in a box’ – (a) do mermaids
generally wear wedding rings, and (b) what do you
think they’ve done with the rest of her body…?

In the fifth stanza, we’re told what happened to the
rest of her body. What do you think led them to do
this, and what do you make of the phrase ‘they
said’? Do you think we’re meant to believe this?

In the sixth and final stanza, we’re told what led
them to do this – do you think it’s a good enough
excuse, assuming that the victim wasn’t actually a
fish or a mermaid?

Assuming the victim wasn’t a fish or a mermaid,
what might the ‘aquarium’ she was taken from
represent? Remember she was held ‘captive’.
Based on his actions, how do you think the
speaker’s uncle feels about his part in all of this?
My Uncle Giuseppe told me that in Sicily in World War Two, in the courtyard behind the aquarium, where the bougainvillea grows so well, the only captive mermaid in the world was butchered on the dry and dusty ground by a doctor, a fishmonger, and certain others.

She, it, had never learned to speak because she was simple, or so they’d said. But the priest who held one of her hands while her throat was cut, said she was only a fish, and fish can’t speak. But she screamed like a woman in terrible fear.

And when they took a ripe golden roe from her side, the doctor said this was proof she was just a fish and anyway an egg is not a child, but refused when some was offered to him.

Then they put her head and her hands in a box for burial and someone tried to take her wedding ring, but the others stopped him, and the ring stayed put.

The rest they cooked and fed to the troops. They said a large fish had been found on the beach.

Starvation forgives men many things, my uncle, the aquarium keeper, said, but couldn’t look me in the eye, for which I thank God.

At the start of the poem we’re told that we’re going to hear a story about something that happened in...

The scene that’s described makes it sound...

Such that when we hear what actually happened there we’re...

We’re told that what happened happened to ‘a mermaid’ that the speaker’s uncle was holding ‘captive’ in his aquarium, but, in reality, we’re given quite a lot of hints that the victim was, in fact, a...

We’re told that she was ‘simple’, meaning she’d ‘never learned to speak’, which makes us feel even more...

We’re also told that they took a ‘ripe golden roe’ or fish ‘egg’ out of her stomach, but if the victim was a ‘woman’, rather than a mermaid then this means that she was...

We’re also told that this ‘egg’ was ‘offered’ to the priest, implying that, like the rest of the victim’s body it was ‘cooked’ to ‘feed the troops’ – this is really...

The last thing we’re told is that the victim was married, which again makes us feel...

Throughout the poem we keep hearing the words ‘they said’ or ‘the priest said’ or ‘the doctor said’, suggesting that the whole thing was...

This suggests that the people involved felt...

As for the speaker, they seem to be...

...which is similar/different to how I feel.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Hopefully you’re starting to get a bit more of a sense now of what this poem’s about, and how, essentially, it’s describing a group of people – including doctors, priests, and prison-guards – lying to themselves and to their relatives about an act of murder and cannibalism that they committed during the second world war.

What we want you to do now is think about how the language, form, and structure reinforces the guilt these people feel.

To start with, spend 15 minutes looking at the first stanza: what techniques do you notice, and what effect do they have?

Make notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

My Uncle Giuseppe told me that in Sicily in World War Two, in the courtyard behind the aquarium, where the bougainvillea grows so well, the only captive mermaid in the world was butchered on the dry and dusty ground by a doctor, a fishmonger, and certain others.

You might want to think about the way in which the poet deliberately misleads us with their use of 

You might also want to think about the use of that verb, as well as the hard consonants that follow, and the antithesis created by juxtaposing the words ‘butchered’ and ‘doctor’.

And finally, you might want to think about the extended metaphor of the ‘mermaid’ and ‘the aquarium’ – which is used to refer euphemistically to a pregnant female prisoner of war. What were the people of Sicily trying to do by telling themselves she was a ‘mermaid’?
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Now do the same with the second stanza, again making notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

But remember to just spend 15 minutes – the goal is to find the main things, rather than everything at this stage.

She, it, had never learned to speak
because she was simple, or so they’d said.
But the priest who held one of her hands
while her throat was cut,
said she was only a fish, and fish can’t speak.
But she screamed like a woman in terrible fear.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2 1/2 hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Now do the same with the third stanza, again making notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

But remember to just spend 15 minutes – the goal is to find the main things, rather than everything at this stage.

And when they took a ripe golden roe
from her side, the doctor said
this was proof she was just a fish
and anyway an egg is not a child,
but refused when some was offered to him.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Now do the same with the fourth stanza, again making notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

But remember to just spend 15 minutes – the goal is to find the main things, rather than everything at this stage.

Then they put her head and her hands in a box for burial
and someone tried to take her wedding ring,
but the others stopped him,
and the ring stayed put.
The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly 2½ hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Now do the same with the fourth stanza, again making notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier. This time just spend 5 minutes – the goal is to find the main things, rather than everything at this stage.

The rest they cooked and fed to the troops.
They said a large fish had been found on the beach.
SECTION 1: COMPULSORY TASKS

The activities in this section should take you around 8 hours to complete in total, which means spending roughly $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours per poem.

POEM 3: ‘Giuseppe’

Now do the same with the fourth stanza, again making notes – either by hand if you’ve printed the booklet, or by inserting text boxes if you’d prefer to do it that way, or on lined paper if that’s easier.

This time spend 15 minutes again, like you did on the first four stanzas – remembering the goal is to find the main things, rather than everything at this stage.

Starvation forgives men many things,
my uncle, the aquarium keeper, said,
but couldn’t look me in the eye,
for which I thank God.
The activities in this section should take you around 4 hours to complete in total, but by completing them you’ll be revising key skills from the GCSE that you’ll need at A-Level and beyond.

IDENTIFYING SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

So far, you’ve studied three poems:

1. The poem ‘Look We Have Coming To Dover’ explored what life is like for the refugees who take great risks by coming to live in England in the hope of a better life.
2. The poem ‘The Deliverer’ explored what life is like for women and girls in India as compared to in the US.
3. The poem ‘Giuseppe’ explored what life was like for people in Italy during the second world war, and what life was like for the prisoners of war that they held hostage.

With this in mind, spend 15 minutes making a list of the things these poems have in common – either by hand, if you’ve printed this out, or by inserting a text box if you’re doing this electronically, or on lined paper if you’ve been working like that up till now. Whatever you choose to do, you can list what’s similar about the themes and ideas, as well as any similarities in terms of language, form, and structure.

Now spend 15 minutes making a list of the things that make them different. These could be differences to do with the kinds of people they focus on, or the parts of the world they focus on, or how optimistic or pessimistic or shocking they each are. But it could also be to do with the poet’s use of language, form, and structure.
Unfortunately, it’s not enough at A-Level to just identify what two texts have in common or what makes them different. You have to think about the reasons for those similarities and differences as well as the consequences of them.

The former is a form of analysis, and the latter is a form of evaluation, and both skills are essential at university and beyond.

With that in mind, spend 30 minutes making notes in response to the following prompts:

One of the things that these poems have in common is that they all focus on people who have struggled. Why do you think that might be?

- Is it something to do with the fact that they were all published from the year 2000 onwards? Give arguments for and against.

- Could it be to do with the poets themselves? Google each quickly to find out if Daljit Nagra or his family were ever refugees, or if Tishani Doshi’s mother actually brought Indian babies to America so that couples could adopt them, or if Roderick Ford’s uncle was really Sicilian etc.

- Can you think of any other explanations why these three poets might have chosen to explore such difficult themes?

- Given that all three poems deal with someone’s struggle, would you say each poem spoke to you to the same extent or not, and why?
ANALYSING AND EVALUATING SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

Now spend 30 minutes making notes in response to the following prompts:

One of the things that separates these poems is that two involve the suffering of a woman, and one is non gender-specific.

• Do you think the gender of the author is the thing that made the difference? Give arguments for and against.

• Do you think the poems that focus on female suffering are more moving, less moving, or equally moving when compared to the one that is non gender-specific? Give reasons to justify your choice.

• Do you think that the two poems that focussed on female suffering would have been more moving, less moving, or as moving if they’d been focussed on one/more male victims? Give reasons to help justify your choice.

• Do you think Tishani Doshi’s poem would have been more moving, less moving, or as moving if it had just focussed on one female victim like Roderick Ford’s poem did? Give reasons to justify your choice.

• Do you think Roderick Ford’s poem would have been more moving, less moving, or as moving if he’d focussed on multiple female victims like Doshi did? Give reasons to justify your choice.
ARTICULATING YOUR IDEAS CLEARLY & CONVINCINGLY

Now spend 30 minutes looking at how the paragraph below have been structured, because being able to get your ideas across clearly and convincingly is another skill that English helps develop, and again it’s a skill that’s essential at uni and beyond.

When you’re doing this, you should be looking for a clear comparative point, relevant evidence from poem 1, relevant evidence from poem 2, technical terms for language, form, and structure, as well as analysis exploring why the poems are similar/different, and evaluation of the impact each similarity/difference has? Label this below.

One of the things that Tishani Doshi’s poem and Roderick Ford’s poem have in common is the fact that both poems deal with suffering. In Ford’s poem we’re told that the person who is suffering is ‘the only captive mermaid’ on the island of Sicily, and her suffering is conveyed not only by the adjective that tells us she is ‘captive’, but also by the verb that tells us she was ‘butchered’ in a courtyard where ‘bougainvillea grows so well’. The juxtaposition of such violence with such beauty is immediately jarring, as are the hard consonants used to describe the ‘dry and dusty ground’ onto which, presumably, she bled. The insertion of a stanza break leaves us to visualise that image for a little longer than we’d like to, but the following stanzas only intensify it more as it’s revealed that (a) the woman was ‘simple’ and (b) the woman was pregnant, or that, at least, is what’s hinted at when we’re told that ‘a ripe golden roe’ was taken from her side. This tender image of a rare and precious life, which is emphasised by the elongated vowel sounds and the roundness of the ‘r’ sound that itself echoes the roundness of the woman’s stomach, is made that much more tragic when it’s implied that it, like the woman’s body, was ‘cooked’ and then ‘fed to the troops’. It’s also made more tragic when we’re told that one of the hands that was held by the priest as she ‘screamed in terrible fear’ bore ‘a wedding ring’ – a sign that this so-called ‘simple’ woman was loved, and didn’t deserve such pain. Like Ford, Doshi also explores the suffering of mothers and children in her poem, but unlike Ford’s poem, which, because of the mermaid metaphor, runs the risk of reading like a tragic fairy-tale, Doshi’s poem is grounded in the real world – literally, in the sense that the girl the poem centres around was found buried almost completely in the earth, until it was ‘dug up by a dog’ who believed it to be either a ‘bone’ or a piece of ‘wood’ that it could ‘chew’. So although the effect is slightly different, Doshi does, like Ford, use metaphors to dehumanise the victim at the centre of this poem. And therefore Doshi, like Ford creates sympathy, for the girl, especially when, like Ford, she refers to ‘hands’ and the little girl’s ‘fetish’ for ‘plucking the hair off’ them. The idea of hands being stripped of their hair in Doshi’s poem is an interesting parallel to the idea of hands being stripped of a wedding ring in Ford’s poem, in that both suggest something exposed or bare or empty, which is something Doshi exploits with her use of the adjectives ‘naked’ and ‘abandoned’ to describe other girls within her poem. But whereas Ford’s victim is eaten, Doshi’s are disposed of like ‘garbage’, thrown on a ‘heap’ like human waste. They’re buried in dirt, not buried in ‘a box’ like the mermaid’s hands and feet, and so arguably Doshi’s poem is the more tragic because it’s victims remain conscious of their pain and suffering – even as they grow. But in terms of why each poet would choose to explore female suffering, it’s harder to say, other than that it has, historically perhaps, been under-represented.
SECTION 2: CORE TASKS

ARTICULATING YOUR IDEAS CLEARLY & CONVINCINGLY

Now spend an hour writing your own paragraph – either comparing Ford or Doshi’s poem to Nagra’s, or exploring another similarity/difference between Doshi and Ford’s poems. When you're doing this, just remember that we're looking for a clear comparative point, relevant evidence and LSF analysis from poem 1, relevant evidence and LSF analysis from poem 2, as well as analysis exploring why the poems are similar/different, and evaluation of the impact each similarity/difference has.
ANALYSING A POEM INDEPENDENTLY

Using the steps that we went through in Section 1, spend 2½ hours trying to get to grips with the poem below. Remember, your first goal is to get to a point where you feel like you understand what’s being described in each stanza. This should take maybe 30 mins.

Patience Agbabi

Eat Me

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
they said, eat me. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn’t even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he’d say, I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.

Soon you’ll be forty... he whispered, and how
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.
ANALYSING A POEM INDEPENDENTLY

Your second goal is to think about the techniques the poet’s using in stanza to get their ideas across. This should take about 1½ hours.

Patience Agbabi

Eat Me

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
they said, eat me. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn’t even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he’d say, I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh
too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.

Soon you’ll be fury... he whispered, and how
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.
ANALYSING A POEM INDEPENDENTLY

Your third goal is to think about the over-arching form and structure of the poem in terms of things like stanza length, line length, enjambment, end-stopping, rhyme, and rhythm etc. This should take roughly 30 minutes.

Patience Agbabi

Eat Me

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
said, EAT ME. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn’t even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he’d say, I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.

Soon you’ll be forty... he whispered, and how
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.
Finally, you want to be thinking about similarities and differences between this poem and the other three you’ve studied. Remember:

1. The poem ‘Look We Have Coming To Dover’ explored what life is like for the refugees who take great risks by coming to live in England in the hope of a better life.
2. The poem ‘The Deliverer’ explored what life is like for women and girls in India as compared to in the US.
3. The poem ‘Giuseppe’ explored what life was like for people in Italy during the second world war, and what life was like for the prisoners of war that they held hostage.

Spend 10 minutes listing the ways in which ‘Eat Me’ explores similar ideas and/or uses similar techniques.

Spend 10 minutes listing the ways in which the ideas in ‘Eat Me’ differ from the other three poems, either in terms of ideas or techniques.

And finally, spend 10 minutes noting down any reasons you can think of to explain these sims/diffs, and whether these sims/diffs make you like this poem more or less than the others.