

Power & Conflict: Knowledge

Exposure (Owen) [KEY POEM]	
Speaker: Owen himself – a soldier during WWI	
Context and writer's intention	Owen wrote 'Exposure' during the First World War, based on his experiences as a soldier on the Western Front. It reflects the oppressive winter conditions that soldiers endured, many dying from exposure to the freezing cold rather than the combat that they expected. Owen challenges the propaganda of the time and the glorification of war by exposing its reality: soldiers who signed up to fulfil their patriotic duty as men suffered both mentally and physically, as they felt increasingly dehumanised. The sense that war was futile crept in as they waited for battle over days and weeks; the real conflict increasingly felt like it was with nature itself – an inescapable and undefeatable enemy. Many soldiers felt abandoned, as if they were waiting to die.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us' (personification of nature, sibilance) • 'Mad gusts tugging on the wire' (personification of nature) • 'Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army' (personification of nature) • 'The flickering gunnery rumbles, Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war' (simile) • 'What are we doing here?' (rhetorical question, collective pronoun) • 'For love of God seems dying' (contrast – spiritual devotion and despair) • 'All their eyes are ice' (metaphor, cyclical structure) <p>KEY QUOTE: 'pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces' (personification of nature)</p>
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrain reflecting the sense of futility ('But nothing happens') • Cyclical structure emphasising inescapability (start and end relate to soldiers freezing) • Juxtaposition between passive soldiers and active weather <p>KEY STRUCTURE/FORM FEATURE: parhyme (partial rhyme)</p>

Remains (Armitage) [KEY POEM]	
Speaker: A soldier after conflict	
Context and writer's intention	Armitage wrote 'Remains' after interviewing soldiers traumatised by their experiences in modern warfare. The poem, based on a real soldier's account, exposes the psychological aftermath of killing a civilian (a looter in a bank). Unlike traditional war poetry, Armitage questions the morality of the ways in which soldiers are treated. He critiques how soldiers are conditioned to become desensitised to violence through their experiences of warfare, before later suffering in isolation, haunted by issues such as PTSD and internal conflict relating to their guilt. As indicated by the title, Armitage connects remnants of the dead and the trauma that 'remains' in the soldier's mind, blurring the line between perpetrator and victim. He seeks to raise awareness and support for such soldiers.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'probably armed, possibly not' (juxtaposition/ambiguity, repetition) • 'Three of a kind all letting fly' (metaphor) • 'I see every round as it rips through his life' (metaphor) • 'One of my mates goes by / And tosses his guts back into his body' (colloquial language) • 'His blood-shadow stays on the street' (symbolism) • 'End of story, except not really' (metaphor, colloquial language, fragmented syntax) • 'But I blink / and he bursts again through the doors of the bank' (enjambment) <p>KEY QUOTE: 'And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out'</p>
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning in medias res • Free verse with irregular line lengths • Frequent enjambment <p>KEY STRUCTURE/FORM FEATURE: Shift from collective pronouns in the past tense to singular pronouns in the present tense</p>

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Ozymandias (Shelley) [KEY POEM]	
Speaker: A person re-telling the story told to him by a traveller who saw the ruins of Ozymandias' statue	
Context and writer's intention	Shelley wrote the poem in 1817, inspired by the discovery of Pharaoh Ramses II's statue (Ozymandias was his Greek name). The poem critiques tyranny and the transience of human power, which is insignificant in comparison to the eternal power of nature. Shelley challenges the hubris of rulers who believe their legacies are everlasting, through the poem's central symbol of Ozymandias' shattered statue in the desert, which represents the inevitable decline of all empires – no matter how grand their monuments. As a Romantic poet, Shelley exposes the vanity of human ambition and the levelling force of time and nature. The poem suggests that all oppressive regimes will share Ozymandias's fate: reduced to ruins and forgotten by history.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'sneer of cold command' (metaphor, plosives) • 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings' (repetition, plosives) • 'Nothing beside remains' (irony) • 'colossal wreck' (oxymoron, irony) • 'boundless and bare' (alliteration, irony, plosives) • 'The lone and level sands stretch far away' (alliteration, sibilance) <p>KEY QUOTE: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"</p>
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three speakers creating a sense of distance (first person speaker, the traveller, and Ozymandias' words on the pedestal – written by the sculptor) • Caesura emphasising irony (particularly after 'Nothing beside remains.') • Cyclical structure (starts and ends with imagery of the barren desert landscape) <p>KEY STRUCTURE/FORM FEATURE: Sonnet form (Petrarchan frame with an irregular rhyme scheme)</p>

Extract from 'The Prelude' (Wordsworth) [KEY POEM]	
Speaker: Wordsworth himself – re-telling an experience during his childhood	
Context and writer's intention	Wordsworth wrote this poem during the Romantic era (late 18th–early 19th century). It explores a transformative childhood experience where he comes to terms with man's insignificance in comparison to nature. This is illustrated through his autobiographical account of stealing a boat and confidently rowing it out in the Lake District at night time, only to become overwhelmed and later haunted by a looming mountain that appears from the horizon. This experience destroys Wordsworth's hubris and develops his appreciation for nature, from something magical and peaceful into an inescapable force of devastating power. Through this, Wordsworth explores how experiences with nature can bring about enlightenment and shape a person's identity.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'troubled pleasure' (oxymoron) • 'Small circles glittering idly in the moon' (light imagery) • 'far above / Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky' (sublime imagery, enjambment) • 'Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point' (third person, simple monosyllabic language) • 'Upreared its head ... strode after me' (personification of the mountain) • 'o'er my thoughts / There hung a darkness' (passive voice, imagery of darkness) <p>KEY QUOTE: 'with trembling oars I turned'</p>
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from confidence to insignificance, light to dark, and fantastical to realistic (around line 21-22) • Blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) throughout • Past tense / first-person retrospective monologue <p>KEY STRUCTURE/FORM FEATURE: Enjambment</p>

Checking Out Me History (Agard) [KEY POEM]	
Speaker: Agard himself – battling to find a sense of identity as a mixed race person born in a British colony	
Context and writer's intention	Agard wrote this poem to critique Eurocentric education systems that marginalize black historical figures. Drawing on his Caribbean heritage, he challenges the 'whitewashed' curriculum that ignores icons who successfully fought against colonial tyranny, such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Nanny of the Maroons. In doing this, Agard highlights his battle to form a sense of identity as a someone born in a colony (Guyana) and later living in the land of the coloniser (Britain). He finds self-discovery through resistance, inspired by the black heroes who are celebrated within the poem for their battles against persecution. This gives Agard the sense of empowerment shared among those who overcome institutionalised oppression.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Dem tell me / Wha dem want to tell me' (non-standard English, modal verb, juxtaposition of unspecified third person subject pronouns v first person object pronoun) • 'Bandage up me eye with me own history' (metaphor) • 'blind me to me own identity' (metaphor) • 'Toussaint de beacon' (metaphor, light imagery) • 'Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492 / But what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too' (rhetorical question) • 'a healing star' (metaphor about Mary Seacole, light imagery) • 'I carving out me identity' (metaphor) <p>KEY QUOTE: 'Dem tell me bout de dish ran away with de spoon'</p>
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juxtaposition of light and dark imagery • Free verse with absence of punctuation • Enjambment <p>KEY STRUCTURE/FORM FEATURE: Irregular stanza structure</p>

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The Charge of the Light Brigade (Tennyson)	
Speaker: A narrator describing the charge (could be seen as Tennyson himself, in his role as poet laureate)	
Context and writer's intention	Tennyson wrote this poem in 1854 to honour the British cavalry's doomed charge during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War, which took place due to a miscommunicated order. The poem glorifies the soldiers' bravery and obedience after they fulfilled their patriotic duty by charging into battle without question, despite being outnumbered by a much more heavily armed enemy that surrounded them as they charged through a valley. Although Tennyson highlights the reality of war and the chaos of battle, his focus is on celebrating the soldiers' noble sacrifice.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred' • 'Theirs but to do and die' • 'Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to left of them, / Cannon in front of them' • 'Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of hell' • 'Flashed all their sabres bare / Flashed as they turned in air' • 'Stormed at with shot and shell' • 'When can their glory fade?'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dactylic rhythm • Refrain ('Rode the six hundred') • Shorter final stanza

Bayonet Charge (Hughes)	
Speaker: A narrator describing a soldier charging at the enemy in WWI	
Context and writer's intention	Hughes wrote this poem to depict the terror and internal conflict of a soldier in World War I, who has been sent out of his trench and 'over the top' to charge against the enemy. Hughes captures the disorienting feeling of this charge as time seems to slow down for the soldier and he questions his reasons for being there – his presence seems increasingly futile. The poem critiques the dehumanising effects of war, stripping away patriotic ideals to reveal raw survival instincts. Hughes contrasts nature with the mechanised violence of warfare, questioning its purpose.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Suddenly he awoke and was running – raw / In raw-seamed hot khaki' • 'Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge' • 'Bullets smacking the belly out of the air –' • 'He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm' • 'Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest' • 'Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame' • 'King, honour, human dignity, etcetera / Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjambment • Caesura • Free verse

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Kamikaze (Garland)	
Speaker: The daughter of a WW2 Japanese kamikaze pilot	
Context and writer's intention	Garland critiques the dangers of patriotism by illustrating how societal expectations can lead to people losing identity and autonomy when they place honour for their country above everything else. She illustrates this through the story of a kamikaze pilot who abandons his suicide mission to return to his family. The pilot is caught in an internal conflict between his patriotic duty and his love for his family, yet his choice to return to live with his loved ones is met with shame for dishonouring his nation during war. By doing this, Garland highlights the oppressive nature of patriotic expectations and how members of society can be conditioned to prioritise honour and patriotism.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Her father embarked at sunrise' • 'a samurai sword / in the cockpit' • 'a shaven head / full of powerful incantations' • 'little fishing boats / strung out like bunting' • 'like a huge flag waved first one way / then the other in a figure of eight, / the dark shoals of fishes' • 'gradually we too learned / to be silent' • 'he must have wondered / which had been the better way to die'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free verse • Irregular stanza structure • Shift in perspective / speaker / voice (omniscient narrator, pilot's daughter's words / pilot's daughter's thoughts – including speculating about her father's thoughts)

Poppies (Weir)	
Speaker: A parent whose child has reached adulthood and left to join the military	
Context and writer's intention	Weir wrote this poem from a mother's perspective after her son leaves for war, to critique the emotional toll that war takes on the families of those left behind. The mother is caught in an internal conflict between her desire to continue protecting her son as if he were still a child, and her duty as a mother to allow him autonomy as a young adult, despite knowing he is still somewhat naïve and vulnerable. The mother suppresses her emotions to allow him freedom.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Three days before Armistice Sunday' • 'Sellotape bandaged around my hand, / I rounded up a many white cat hairs / as I could' • 'steemed the softening of my face' • 'A split second / and you were away, intoxicated' • 'I went into your bedroom, / released a song bird from its cage' • 'The dove pulled freely against the sky' • 'I listened, hoping to hear / your playground voice catching on the wind'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free verse • Enjambment • Juxtaposition between domestic imagery and war

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War Photographer (Duffy)	
Speaker: A narrator describing the experiences of a war photographer	
Context and writer's intention	Duffy wrote this poem to critique the desensitised way in which suffering is consumed through media, highlighting the internal conflict of a war photographer. The poem is inspired by real photographers who documented war zones, and it explores the tension between their duty and the brutality that they capture. Duffy exposes how the photographer is caught between two worlds: the warzones he photographs, and the comfortable domestic lives of newspaper readers, who remain emotionally distant from the reality of conflict. The poem suggests that the photographer is traumatised, grappling with his morality, and questions whether his work makes any real difference.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'In his darkroom he is finally alone' • 'The only light is red and softly glows' • 'spools of suffering set out in ordered rows' • 'as though this were a church and he / a priest' • 'a half-formed ghost' • 'a hundred agonies in black-and-white' • 'The reader's eyeballs prick / with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular rhyme scheme and stanza length • Enjambment • Juxtaposition between settings of warzones and 'rural England'

The Emigrée (Rumens)	
Speaker: An emigrant who has been forced to leave her home country due to tyranny and oppression	
Context and writer's intention	Rumens explores the experience of an emigrant who has an idealised memory of their homeland, which they have now been exiled from. The poem is a reflection on identity and autonomy, and how memory can preserve hope and beauty even when a place has been lost to political oppression. Rumens critiques the forces—such as dictatorship or tyranny—that can strip people of agency, while also showing how the human spirit clings to light and heritage through language and memory, which shape our identity.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'There once was a country... I left it as a child' • 'my original view, the bright, filled paperweight' • 'it may be sick with tyrants' • 'I am branded by an impression of sunlight' • 'The white streets of that city ... glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks' • 'That child's vocabulary I carried here / like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar. Soon I shall have every coloured molecule of it' • 'I comb its hair and love its shining eyes'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free verse • Motif of sunlight (which ends every stanza) • Shifts in tense

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Storm on the Island (Heaney)	
Speaker: A member of an island community preparing for a storm	
Context and writer's intention	Heaney uses this poem to highlight the unpredictable power of nature. In the poem, the island community prepares for a storm, and while nothing arrives to cause physical suffering, the poem explores how fear itself becomes an almost supernatural presence. Heaney critiques how humans attempt to assert control over nature, only to be humbled by its brutality. He also reflects on the human condition — our vulnerability and isolation when confronted with forces beyond our understanding. These experiences may allegorically represent the psychological effects of living through a time of conflict, possibly referencing the Troubles in Northern Ireland.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'We are prepared: we build our houses squat' • 'you listen to the thing you fear / Forgetting that it pummels your house too' • 'You might think that the sea is company / Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs' • 'spits like a tame cat / Turned savage' • 'We just sit tight while wind dives / And strafes invisibly' • 'We are bombarded by the empty air' • 'Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) throughout • Enjambment • No stanza breaks

Tissue (Dharker)	
Speaker: A detached, omniscient narrator	
Context and writer's intention	Dharker wrote this poem to explore the transience of human constructs, which often exist as symbols of humanity's hubris. She asks the reader to imagine that these constructs are made of paper, for us to realise that they are more fragile than they seem. She critiques the rigidity of things that often define human identity and separate us (such as nationality and finance) and create inequality, pointing out that all of these are fragile and transient, too. Dharker appeals for society to be more enlightened, by turning our back on the artificial constructs (like money, borders and buildings) that separate us physically and emotionally, and instead appreciating nature and forming connections during our transient lives.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Paper that lets the light / shine through, this / is what could alter things' • 'If buildings were paper, I might / feel their drift, see how easily / they fall' • 'Maps too. The sun shines through / their borderlines' • 'Fine slips from grocery shops ... might fly our lives like paper kites' • 'never wish to build again with brick / or block' • 'let the daylight break / through capitals and monoliths, / through the shapes that pride can make' • 'living tissue ... a structure / never meant to last'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free verse • Regular four line stanzas (quatrains) until the final isolated line • Enjambment

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London (Blake)	
Speaker: Blake himself – based on his experiences living in London and walking through its streets	
Context and writer's intention	Blake wrote this poem to highlight the social inequality he witnessed in London during the Industrial Revolution, critiquing how those in poverty were oppressed and dehumanised while others became wealthier and more powerful. The poem reflects on how the mental and physical suffering of the poor was perpetuated through the corruption of society, including powerful institutions such as the church and monarchy. Blake illustrates the inescapable brutal conditions suffered by the victims of this inequality, including people of all ages and genders.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'chartered street ... chartered Thames' • 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe' • 'mind-forged manacles' • 'Every black'ning church appalls' • 'The hapless soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down palace walls' • 'the youthful harlot's curse' • 'blights with plagues the marriage hearse'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular rhyme scheme • Regular rhythm (tetrameter – although it switches between iambic and trochaic) • Regular stanza length (quatrains)

My Last Duchess (Browning)	
Speaker: The Duke of Ferrara (an Italian city-state) – inspired by Duke Alfonso II	
Context and writer's intention	Browning's speaker in this poem is a manipulative Duke who recounts the story of his late wife, gradually revealing his jealousy, insecurity, and obsession with control. The poem critiques patriarchal values and the dehumanisation of women within hierarchical society. The Duke sees his wife as a possession rather than a person, suggesting that her autonomy and innocence were threats to his status, which defines his identity. The Duke appears controlled and proud, masking the brutal nature of his actions. The poem functions as a social commentary on the corruption of power and obsession with honour and reputation.
Useful quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'That's my last Duchess painted on the wall' • 'none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I' • 'perhaps' • 'She had / A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad' • 'My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name' • 'I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together' • 'Notice Neptune, though, / Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity'
Useful structure/form features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular rhythm (iambic pentameter) • Regular rhyme scheme (rhyming couplets) • Enjambment, without stanza breaks