

Modern Australian Poetry for Selective Test Exam

Scholarly 

Introduction

Welcome to this guide on modern Australian poetry! This resource is designed to help you prepare for the poetry comprehension section of the NSW Selective Schools Test. In this test, you'll encounter poems that explore themes related to identity, family relationships, nature, growing up, and Australian experiences.

When reading poetry, remember to consider:

- The poem's overall meaning and message
- The techniques used by the poet (metaphors, similes, personification)
- The imagery and word choices
- The structure and rhythm
- The tone and mood
- How the poem makes you feel

Let's explore some examples of modern Australian poetry that might appear in your test, with detailed analysis to help you understand how to approach poetry comprehension questions.

Poem 1: "My Father Began as a God" by Ian Mudie

My father began as a god
full of heroic tales
of days when he was young.
Then he became a man
competing with me in everything.
If I kicked ten goals
he'd kicked eleven
when he was my age.
If I got a hundred runs
his century was better
on a worse wicket.
If, rarely, I beat him at anything
Luck was with me that day.
Finally, he became a child,
anxious for my approval;
happy to have me push his wheelchair
in the sun.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

My father began as a god
full of heroic tales

of days when he was young.

- Opens with a strong metaphor comparing the father to a "god"
- Suggests the child's initial perception of the father as all-powerful and all-knowing
- "Heroic tales" suggests admiration and awe from the child's perspective
- Establishes the starting point of the relationship and perception

STANZA 2

Then he became a man
competing with me in everything.
If I kicked ten goals
he'd kicked eleven
when he was my age.

- Transition marked by "Then" - shows change in perception
- Father shifts from deity to "man" - more human, with flaws
- Introduces competition between father and son
- Uses specific examples (goals in football) to illustrate the competition
- Reveals the father's need to maintain superiority

STANZA 3

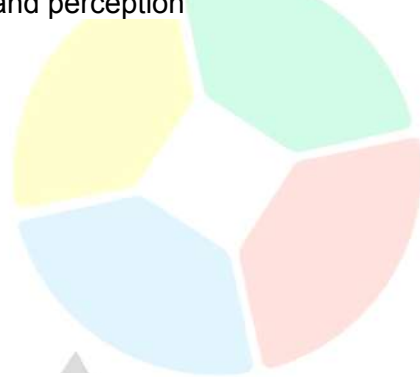
If I got a hundred runs
his century was better
on a worse wicket.
If, rarely, I beat him at anything
Luck was with me that day.

- Continues the pattern of competition with cricket references
- "Worse wicket" emphasises how the father diminishes the son's achievements
- "Luck" suggests the father can't accept being surpassed by his son
- Shows the father's insecurity despite maintaining a façade of superiority

STANZA 4

Finally, he became a child,
anxious for my approval;
happy to have me push his wheelchair
in the sun.

- Final transition marked by "Finally" - completes the cycle
- Role reversal: father now like a "child" dependent on the son
- "Anxious for my approval" shows complete power shift in the relationship
- Wheelchair image conveys physical dependency and vulnerability
- Concludes with a peaceful, accepting image ("in the sun") suggesting resolution



Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Changing family dynamics, aging, parent-child relationships, perception, time, role reversal

Tone: Reflective, matter-of-fact, slightly ironic → accepting

Key Techniques:

- Extended metaphor (father as god → man → child)
- Specific concrete examples (sports references)
- Simple, direct language conveying complex emotions
- Three-part structure mirroring the three stages of the relationship

Structure: Free verse with three distinct sections marking the father's transformation

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The poem is primarily about:
A) A father who was an excellent athlete in his youth
B) The changing perception of a father through his son's eyes
C) A son's resentment toward his competitive father
D) The physical decline of an elderly parent
 2. Which literary device is used in the line "My father began as a god"?
A) Personification
B) Simile
C) Metaphor
D) Hyperbole
 3. The structure of the poem reflects:
A) The passing of the four seasons
B) The three stages in the father-son relationship
C) Different sporting competitions they engaged in
D) The son's growing resentment toward his father
 4. In the second and third stanzas, the father's behaviour suggests he is:
A) Proud of his son's achievements
B) Trying to inspire his son to greater efforts
C) Insecure about his own status and abilities
D) Remembering his youth accurately
 5. What is suggested by the line "Luck was with me that day"?
A) The father genuinely believed the son was lucky
B) The son actually needed luck to win
C) The father couldn't accept being beaten by his son
D) The son rarely tried to compete with his father
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Poem 2: "Mangrove" by Judith Wright

Through mud and silence, through the tideless waters
that creep below the aerial roads, I come to you with nets.
Wary, mud-valved, the oyster-studded roots
are gaunt as mammoths, for as long as life
the mangrove clutches at these sailing creeks;
old suicides, the rotting trunks tip down
their plummet-weighted claws.

I come with human eyes, with tongue's intrusion,
the clumsy step pushing your rippled waters
apart in rings. I see, but cannot read
the wrinkled message of your crannied roots,
old adept of time, whose leaf and flower
so passive on the water, hide beneath
the labyrinth, the rooted mysteries.

My years float off like leaves along the still
procession of these days. Yet hidden in me
as in your world of silence, under
the surface waiting, coil the snake-locked waters,
the bitter tides. Death's in your maze of waters,
so is renewal. And in me, death also —
but oh, the bright emergent flower.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

Through mud and silence, through the tideless waters
that creep below the aerial roads, I come to you with nets.

- Opens with a journey through difficult terrain: "mud and silence"
- "Tideless waters" suggests stagnation, timelessness
- "Aerial roads" creates an image of mangrove roots creating pathways above water
- "I come to you with nets" positions the speaker as an intruder/hunter/collector

Wary, mud-valved, the oyster-studded roots
are gaunt as mammoths, for as long as life
the mangrove clutches at these sailing creeks;

- Personifies the mangroves as "wary" - giving them awareness
- Simile comparing roots to extinct "mammoths" - suggests ancient, prehistoric quality
- "Clutches" personifies the mangrove again, giving it determination and desperation
- Creates a sense of timelessness and survival

old suicides, the rotting trunks tip down



their plummet-weighted claws.

- Dark metaphor of "old suicides" for the fallen trees
- "Plummet-weighted claws" creates ominous imagery
- Gives mangroves animal-like qualities ("claws") - threatening, predatory

STANZA 2

I come with human eyes, with tongue's intrusion,
the clumsy step pushing your rippled waters
apart in rings. I see, but cannot read

- Speaker acknowledges their outsider status - human vs nature
- "Tongue's intrusion" suggests human language disrupts natural silence
- "Clumsy step" contrasts with the mangrove's ancient grace
- "I see, but cannot read" admits limitation of human understanding

the wrinkled message of your crannied roots,
old adept of time, whose leaf and flower
so passive on the water, hide beneath
the labyrinth, the rooted mysteries.

- "Wrinkled message" suggests nature contains wisdom, like an elderly face
- "Old adept of time" personifies mangroves as masters of survival
- Contrast between passive surface appearance and complex hidden depths
- "Labyrinth" and "mysteries" emphasise the unknowable aspects of nature

STANZA 3

My years float off like leaves along the still
procession of these days. Yet hidden in me
as in your world of silence, under

- Simile comparing human lifespan to floating leaves - transience of human life
- "Still procession" suggests slow, ceremonial passage of time
- Begins to draw parallels between human and mangrove existence
- "World of silence" contrasts with human noise and activity

the surface waiting, coil the snake-locked waters,
the bitter tides. Death's in your maze of waters,
so is renewal. And in me, death also —
but oh, the bright emergent flower.

- "Snake-locked waters" creates threatening, mythological imagery
- "Bitter tides" suggests difficult experiences that come and go
- Recognition of death and renewal as natural cycles in both mangroves and humans
- Final line shifts to hope and possibility with "bright emergent flower"
- Ends on transformation and rebirth despite acknowledging mortality

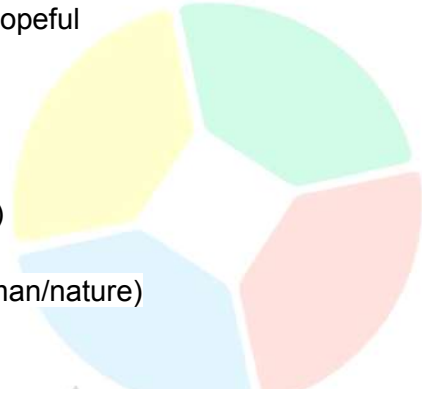
Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Nature's resilience, human limitations, time, mortality, renewal, hidden depths beneath surfaces

Tone: Contemplative, reverent, slightly melancholic → hopeful

Key Techniques:

- Rich imagery (particularly visual and tactile)
- Extended metaphor (mangrove as ancient being)
- Personification of nature
- Juxtaposition (surface/depth, death/renewal, human/nature)
- Allusions to labyrinths and mythological imagery



Structure: Three stanzas of varying length with free verse form that mimics organic growth

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The speaker in the poem approaches the mangroves:
A) As a scientist studying their ecosystem
B) As a fisher looking for oysters
C) As an intruder aware of their outsider status
D) As someone seeking shelter from a storm
2. The phrase "old suicides, the rotting trunks tip down" is an example of:
A) Personification
B) Simile
C) Metaphor
D) Hyperbole
3. According to the poem, the relationship between the speaker and the mangroves is best described as:
A) Mutual understanding and harmony
B) Scientific observation and classification
C) Human limitation in understanding nature's complexity
D) Fear and avoidance of a dangerous environment
4. The "wrinkled message" and "crannied roots" suggest that the mangroves:
A) Are diseased and dying
B) Contain ancient wisdom difficult for humans to access
C) Have been damaged by human interference
D) Are communicating directly with the speaker
5. In the final stanza, "My years float off like leaves" is:
A) A metaphor comparing human mortality to decaying vegetation
B) A simile comparing the passage of time to fallen leaves

- C) An allusion to the seasonal changes of mangroves
D) A literal description of leaves in the water
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Poem 3: "Grandma" by Peter Skrzynecki

Your house smelt of apples and cinnamon
Of old carpets and finger-prints
On photographs – and the pages
Of your white Bible
That felt like vellum
When you recited from the Psalms.

Your proverbs were a cure for everything:
How to remove stains,
Make a perfect omelette –
"Don't keep looking inside
Or it'll all fall down".

Whenever I looked into your eyes
It was like drinking tea
Made from a herb that blossomed
Once in a hundred years.

Always, you wore
An apron with faded roses
And a straw hat with a crocheted band
When you worked in the garden.

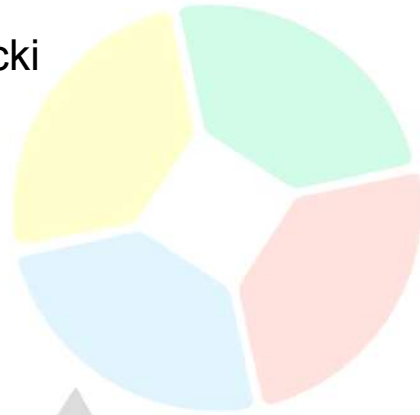
Once, you stacked wood
Against the woodshed
Higher than I could reach.
"Now what would we do in winter
If all this wood was gone?"

When your silhouette
Dissolved in the evening sun
I watched stars colliding
Until there was only
Their dust left in the breeze.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

Your house smelt of apples and cinnamon
Of old carpets and finger-prints



On photographs – and the pages
Of your white Bible
That felt like vellum
When you recited from the Psalms.

- Opens with sensory details - smell of "apples and cinnamon" creating warmth
- "Old carpets and finger-prints" suggests well-used, lived-in spaces
- Fingerprints on photos indicate they're often handled, cherished
- The white Bible introduces religious element, tradition
- "Vellum" suggests something ancient, precious, and delicate
- Creates a detailed sensory portrait of Grandma's home and life

STANZA 2

Your proverbs were a cure for everything:
How to remove stains,
Make a perfect omelette –
"Don't keep looking inside
Or it'll all fall down".

- Presents Grandma as source of wisdom through "proverbs"
- Mixes practical advice (stains, cooking) with philosophical life lessons
- The specific omelette advice works as metaphor for patience and trust
- Shows Grandma's down-to-earth approach to life's challenges
- Her wisdom blends everyday tasks with deeper meaning

STANZA 3

Whenever I looked into your eyes
It was like drinking tea
Made from a herb that blossomed
Once in a hundred years.

- Beautiful simile comparing Grandma's gaze to rare, precious tea
- Suggests her wisdom is rare, special, and healing
- "Once in a hundred years" emphasises her uniqueness and irreplaceability
- Creates sense of preciousness and fleeting connection

STANZA 4

Always, you wore
An apron with faded roses
And a straw hat with a crocheted band
When you worked in the garden.

- Specific clothing details create vivid character portrait
- "Faded roses" suggests age, history, beauty that endures despite time
- Garden work shows her connection to earth, growing things

- Simple, detailed observation conveys deep affection

STANZA 5

Once, you stacked wood
Against the woodshed
Higher than I could reach.
"Now what would we do in winter
If all this wood was gone?"

- Specific memory highlights Grandma's strength and practicality
- Wood stacked "higher than I could reach" shows child's perspective
- Final question reveals her foresight, preparation, responsibility
- Shows she teaches through example and gentle questions
- Wisdom about preparation and thinking ahead

STANZA 6

When your silhouette
Dissolved in the evening sun
I watched stars colliding
Until there was only
Their dust left in the breeze.

- Shift to metaphorical, poetic language signals emotional impact
- "Dissolved in the evening sun" suggests her passing/death
- Cosmic imagery ("stars colliding") elevates her ordinary life to something magnificent
- "Dust left in the breeze" evokes both fragility and lasting presence
- Bittersweet ending acknowledges loss while preserving memory

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Family bonds, immigrant experience, cultural heritage, memory, wisdom, loss, everyday sacredness

Tone: Tender, nostalgic, reverent, gently elegiac

Key Techniques:

- Sensory imagery (especially smells and visual details)
- Simile and metaphor
- Specific concrete details to evoke character
- Direct quotes to bring Grandma's voice to life
- Contrast between everyday objects and cosmic significance

Structure: Six stanzas of varying length, creating a collection of memories that build to emotional conclusion

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The overall mood of the poem is best described as:
A) Critical and questioning
B) Nostalgic and admiring
C) Anxious and uncertain
D) Humorous and lighthearted
2. Which of the following is NOT a sensory detail used to describe Grandma's house?
A) The smell of apples and cinnamon
B) The touch of the Bible pages
C) The sound of her singing
D) The sight of fingerprints on photographs
3. The line "Don't keep looking inside or it'll all fall down" can be interpreted as advice about:
A) Only making omelettes
B) Avoiding self-reflection
C) Having patience and trust in processes
D) Maintaining the structural integrity of the house
4. The simile comparing looking into Grandma's eyes to "drinking tea made from a herb that blossomed once in a hundred years" suggests that:
A) The grandmother was very old
B) Her wisdom and presence were rare and precious
C) She made medicinal teas as remedies
D) The speaker rarely visited her
5. What does the detail about Grandma stacking wood "higher than I could reach" suggest about her?
A) She was physically stronger than the speaker
B) She was unnecessarily worried about winter
C) She was trying to make the speaker feel inadequate
D) She was wasteful with resources

Answer Key for Poems 1 - 3

"My Father Began as a God" by Ian Mudie

1. B) The changing perception of a father through his son's eyes *This answer captures the central progression of the poem, which tracks how the speaker's view of his father changes from god-like figure to competitive man to dependent child.*
2. C) Metaphor *This is a metaphor because it directly states the father "began as a god" rather than using "like" or "as" (which would make it a simile). It's not merely exaggeration (hyperbole) but a comparison that runs throughout the poem.*

3. B) The three stages in the father-son relationship *The poem has a clear three-part structure that mirrors the three perceptions of the father: god, man, and child.*
4. C) Insecure about his own status and abilities *The father's need to always one-up his son's achievements suggests insecurity about his own standing and fear of being surpassed.*
5. C) The father couldn't accept being beaten by his son *This line shows the father making excuses when his son outperforms him, revealing his inability to accept the shifting power dynamic.*

"Mangrove" by Judith Wright

1. C) As an intruder aware of their outsider status *The poem repeatedly emphasizes the speaker's human presence as an intrusion into the mangrove's world, with phrases like "tongue's intrusion" and "clumsy step."*
2. C) Metaphor *This is a metaphor that compares the fallen tree trunks to people who have committed suicide, creating a dark, haunting image.*
3. C) Human limitation in understanding nature's complexity *The speaker explicitly states "I see, but cannot read the wrinkled message," acknowledging their inability to fully comprehend the mangrove's ancient wisdom.*
4. B) Contain ancient wisdom difficult for humans to access *The poem portrays the mangroves as "old adept of time" with hidden messages that humans cannot easily interpret.*
5. B) A simile comparing the passage of time to fallen leaves *This is a simile using "like" to compare the speaker's passing years to leaves floating on water, suggesting the transience of human life.*

"Grandma" by Peter Skrzynecki

- B) Nostalgic and admiring *The poem consistently shows warmth, respect, and affection for Grandma through detailed, loving descriptions of her home, wisdom, and presence.*
- C) The sound of her singing *While the poem mentions smells, touch, and visual details, there is no reference to Grandma singing or any sounds she makes except reciting Psalms.*
- C) Having patience and trust in processes *While literally about making omelettes, this advice functions as a metaphor for not interfering with processes that need time and trust to develop properly.*

- B) Her wisdom and presence were rare and precious *The comparison to a rare herb emphasizes how special and valuable the grandmother's perspective and presence were to the speaker.*
- A) She was physically stronger than the speaker *This detail shows Grandma's physical capability and resilience, especially in contrast to the child speaker who couldn't reach as high.*

Poem 4: "Lamb" by Billy Collins

The lamb came into the world
in the usual way,
a wet nose glistening
in the sudden light,
legs wobbling.

It looked at me and I looked back,
thinking it was good,
good to be a mammal.

Good to stand on four legs
under the warm milk bag of your mother,
good to have your face pushed
into the world with blood and slime.

Good to start walking right after birth,
good to follow the others to pasture,
good to have thick wool growing
evenly out of your skin.

Yet I wondered as I looked
into its blank, innocent face,
if the lamb was thinking
that it was good to be a human,

good to be a biped,
good to have a high, dry house,
good to be on a higher link
of the food chain.

The truth is, the lamb
was thinking nothing at all,
only walking forward
on its new legs to get milk.

But I go on thinking for the lamb,

wondering what it is thinking,
thinking what it might be thinking,
while it just stands there chewing.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

The lamb came into the world
in the usual way,
a wet nose glistening
in the sudden light,
legs wobbling.

- Opens with simple, direct statement about birth
- "In the usual way" suggests naturalness, ordinariness of life beginning
- Sensory details: "wet nose glistening" (visual, tactile)
- "Sudden light" captures the lamb's perspective of birth
- "Legs wobbling" creates vulnerable, endearing image

STANZA 2

It looked at me and I looked back,
thinking it was good,
good to be a mammal.

- Establishes connection between observer and lamb through shared gaze
- Simple repetition of "good" creates biblical echo ("And God saw that it was good")
- "Good to be a mammal" suggests kinship despite species difference
- Short stanza creates pause for this contemplative moment

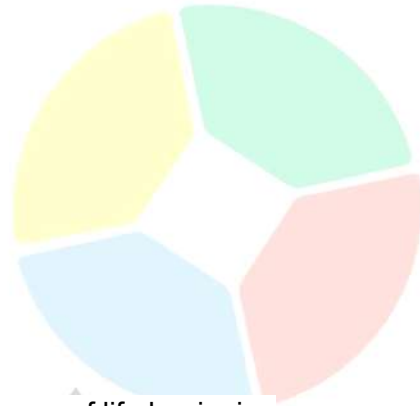
STANZA 3

Good to stand on four legs
under the warm milk bag of your mother,
good to have your face pushed
into the world with blood and slime.

- Continues repetition of "good" emphasising positive aspects of animal existence
- Mixture of tender imagery ("warm milk bag") with graphic birth details ("blood and slime")
- Speaker imagining lamb's perspective and experience
- Matter-of-fact celebration of physical, messy aspects of life

STANZA 4

Good to start walking right after birth,
good to follow the others to pasture,



good to have thick wool growing
evenly out of your skin.

- Extends the list of advantages of being a lamb
- Highlights lamb's instinctive abilities (walking immediately)
- References social nature ("follow the others")
- "Thick wool growing evenly" presents natural protection and purpose

STANZA 5

Yet I wondered as I looked
into its blank, innocent face,
if the lamb was thinking
that it was good to be a human,

- Shift marked by "Yet" - moves from speaker projecting thoughts to questioning
- "Blank, innocent face" emphasises lamb's simplicity, purity
- Introduces reverse perspective - what might lamb think of human?
- Shows human tendency to project and wonder about animal consciousness

STANZA 6

good to be a biped,
good to have a high, dry house,
good to be on a higher link
of the food chain.

- Mirror structure: now listing advantages of being human
- "Biped" provides scientific contrast to lamb's four legs
- "High, dry house" emphasises human comforts and separation from nature
- "Higher link of the food chain" acknowledges power relationship between humans and lambs
- Suggests human superiority but with potential irony

STANZA 7

The truth is, the lamb
was thinking nothing at all,
only walking forward
on its new legs to get milk.

- "The truth is" signals reality check
- Acknowledges projection and anthropomorphism
- Returns to simple animal reality - lamb focused only on immediate needs
- Reminder of unbridgeable gap between human and animal consciousness
- Returns to physical image of "new legs" from first stanza

STANZA 8

But I go on thinking for the lamb,
wondering what it is thinking,
thinking what it might be thinking,
while it just stands there chewing.

- "But" signals final ironic twist
- Triple repetition of "thinking" emphasises human overcomplication
- Contrasts with lamb "just...chewing" - simple, present-focused existence
- Gentle self-mockery of human tendency to overthink and project
- Ends with mundane, concrete image that grounds the poem

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Human-animal relationships, consciousness, projection, innocence, natural existence, overthinking

Tone: Contemplative, gently self-mocking, wonder → ironic realisation


Key Techniques:

- Repetition ("good to be...")
- Contrast (human vs. animal experience)
- Sensory imagery
- Biblical allusions
- Self-awareness and irony
- Simple, accessible language conveying philosophical depth

Structure: Eight stanzas with varied lengths, moving from observation to projection to realisation

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The speaker's initial observation of the lamb leads them to feel:
A) Pity for its vulnerable condition
B) A sense of kinship as fellow mammals
C) Superiority as a more evolved being
D) Concern about its welfare
2. The repeated phrase "good to be" in the poem is most similar to:
A) A scientific classification
B) A biblical refrain about creation
C) A child's simple observation
D) A farmer's practical assessment
3. When the speaker imagines the lamb thinking about human advantages, this primarily reveals:
A) The speaker's expertise on animal psychology

- B) The lamb's advanced cognitive abilities
C) The human tendency to project our thoughts onto animals
D) The superiority of human existence
4. The tone shift that occurs in stanza 7 ("The truth is...") can best be described as:
A) From contemplative to harshly realistic
B) From scientific to spiritual
C) From imaginary projection to simple observation
D) From optimistic to deeply pessimistic
5. The final stanza of the poem suggests that:
A) The lamb is actually hiding complex thoughts
B) Humans overthink while animals simply exist
C) The speaker has successfully understood the lamb's perspective
D) Animal consciousness is superior to human consciousness
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Poem 5: "Drifters" by Bruce Dawe

One day soon he'll tell her it's time to start packing
and the kids will yell 'Truly?' and get wildly excited for no reason
and the brown kelpie pup will start dashing about, tripping everyone up
and she'll go out to the vegetable patch and pick all the green tomatoes from the vines
and notice how the oldest girl is close to tears because she was happy here,
and how the youngest girl is beaming because she wasn't.

And the first thing she'll put on the trailer will be the bottling-set
she never unpacked from Grovedale,
and when the loaded ute bumps down the drive past the blackberry canes
with the dogs panting on the tailgate
she won't even ask why they're leaving this time, or where they're headed for
she'll only remember how, when they came here
she held out her hands, bright with berries,
the first of the season, and said:
'Make a wish, Tom, make a wish.'

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

One day soon he'll tell her it's time to start packing
and the kids will yell 'Truly?' and get wildly excited for no reason
and the brown kelpie pup will start dashing about, tripping everyone up

- Opens with matter-of-fact prediction suggesting this is a recurring pattern
- "One day soon" creates sense of inevitability
- No explanation given for move - emphasises arbitrary nature

- Children's excited reaction shows they're accustomed to this nomadic life
- "For no reason" suggests their excitement lacks understanding of implications
- Kelpie (Australian dog breed) adds cultural context
- "Dashing about" creates chaotic energy contrasting with serious decision

and she'll go out to the vegetable patch and pick all the green tomatoes from the vines and notice how the oldest girl is close to tears because she was happy here, and how the youngest girl is beaming because she wasn't.

- Green (unripe) tomatoes symbolise interrupted growth, plans cut short
- Mother's practical action (salvaging what she can) shows resilience
- Contrasting reactions of daughters reveals different adaptability to transient lifestyle
- Oldest child has formed attachments, youngest hasn't yet learned to
- Simple observation of emotions rather than direct description creates poignancy

STANZA 2

And the first thing she'll put on the trailer will be the bottling-set she never unpacked from Grovedale,

- Bottling-set (for preserving food) symbolises desire for permanence, preparedness
- "Never unpacked" reveals she anticipated another move
- Named location (Grovedale) places poem in Australian context
- Suggests pattern of moves, history of impermanence

and when the loaded ute bumps down the drive past the blackberry canes with the dogs panting on the tailgate

- "Ute" (utility vehicle) adds Australian cultural marker
- "Bumps down the drive" creates sense of departure's physical sensation
- Blackberry canes represent what's being left behind - wild fruit, potential harvest
- Dogs on tailgate create vivid Australian rural image

she won't even ask why they're leaving this time, or where they're headed for she'll only remember how, when they came here

- "Won't even ask" suggests resignation, acceptance of pattern
- Absence of questioning highlights lack of agency
- Focus shifts from future uncertainty to past memory
- Creates circular pattern - arriving, departing, arriving somewhere new

she held out her hands, bright with berries, the first of the season, and said:
'Make a wish, Tom, make a wish.'

- "Bright with berries" creates vivid visual image
- Berries symbolise temporary abundance, fleeting opportunities
- "First of the season" represents hope, new beginnings

- Direct speech creates intimate moment between couple
- "Make a wish" reveals her continued hope despite pattern of disappointment
- Final repetition emphasises poignancy of her optimism
- Use of name "Tom" is only personal identifier in poem, creating sudden intimacy

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Transience, hope despite disappointment, family dynamics, Australian rural life, rootlessness, adaptation vs attachment

Tone: Matter-of-fact, resigned → wistful, quietly hopeful

Key Techniques:

- Extended prediction (future tense throughout)
- Symbolism (green tomatoes, bottling-set, berries)
- Contrasting responses (children's different reactions)
- Repetition
- Australian vernacular and cultural references
- Detailed domestic imagery

Structure: Two stanzas with uneven lengths, mirroring the disrupted, unbalanced life depicted

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The structure of the poem, written entirely in future tense, suggests:
 - A) The family is planning their first move
 - B) The mother is anxiously anticipating a move
 - C) This pattern of moving has happened repeatedly
 - D) The move is unexpected and unusual
2. The green tomatoes in the poem symbolise:
 - A) The family's poverty and need to save food
 - B) The mother's careful household management
 - C) Plans and growth interrupted before completion
 - D) The Australian rural setting of the poem
3. The contrasting reactions of the daughters reveal:
 - A) Their different age-appropriate interests
 - B) Their opposing relationships with their father
 - C) Different degrees of attachment and adaptation to places
 - D) The mother's favouritism toward the youngest
4. The "bottling-set she never unpacked from Grovedale" suggests:
 - A) The mother is disorganised and forgetful
 - B) The family anticipated another move all along

- C) They didn't have enough space to unpack everything
 - D) The mother dislikes domestic tasks
5. The final image of berries and wish-making functions as:
- A) A contrast between past hope and present resignation
 - B) Evidence of the mother's childish thinking
 - C) A suggestion that the father controls all family decisions
 - D) A symbol of the Australian landscape they're leaving

Poem 6: "My Mother's Hands" by Joanne Burns

Her hands shaped pastry like birds
patting the flour into wings.
Pinching scalloped edges to hold
the stewed apples, butter and cinnamon.
No recipe was needed, she had
the knowledge in her fingers.

Those hands were gentle when I was sick,
cool on my forehead, mild on my pulse.
Yet they could be firm, propelling me
away from danger or toward books.
I knew all their moods and translations.

Sometimes they were red and chapped
from washing and wringing and scrubbing.
I watched them age, the veins rising
like blue rivers on a relief map,
the knuckles swelling like small stones.

Now I study my own hands
turning into hers. The same shape,
the same gestures as I cook,
the same habit of touching fabric
in a shop to test its quality.

I remember her hands folded finally
on white linen, still beautiful
to me, still holding all her stories
that live now in mine.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

Her hands shaped pastry like birds

patting the flour into wings.
Pinching scalloped edges to hold
the stewed apples, butter and cinnamon.
No recipe was needed, she had
the knowledge in her fingers.

- Opens with simile comparing hands to birds - suggests grace, skill, gentleness
- "Patting the flour into wings" extends bird metaphor, creates visual image
- "Pinching scalloped edges" captures precise, delicate movements
- Sensory details of filling (apples, butter, cinnamon) appeal to smell, taste
- "No recipe was needed" suggests intuitive knowledge, experience
- "Knowledge in her fingers" portrays embodied wisdom, learned through practice

STANZA 2

Those hands were gentle when I was sick,
cool on my forehead, mild on my pulse.
Yet they could be firm, propelling me
away from danger or toward books.
I knew all their moods and translations.

- Shift to hands as instruments of care during illness
- "Cool" and "mild" create tactile sensations of comfort
- "Yet" signals contrast - hands also provided discipline, guidance
- "Propelling" suggests force but with positive intent (protection, education)
- "Moods and translations" personifies hands as having their own language
- Suggests intimate understanding between mother and child

STANZA 3

Sometimes they were red and chapped
from washing and wringing and scrubbing.
I watched them age, the veins rising
like blue rivers on a relief map,
the knuckles swelling like small stones.

- Depicts physical toll of domestic work
- Triple gerund "washing and wringing and scrubbing" emphasises repetitive labour
- "I watched them age" signals passage of time, speaker's growing awareness
- Simile comparing veins to "blue rivers on a relief map" creates vivid visual image
- "Knuckles swelling like small stones" suggests both hardness and pain
- Geographic imagery (rivers, maps, stones) transforms hands into a landscape

STANZA 4

Now I study my own hands
turning into hers. The same shape,
the same gestures as I cook,

the same habit of touching fabric
in a shop to test its quality.

- "Now" marks transition to present, speaker's self-reflection
- "Turning into hers" suggests inheritance, genetic connection, cycle of generations
- Repetition of "the same" emphasises continuity, inheritance
- Specific detail of "touching fabric" shows how precise mannerisms are passed down
- "Test its quality" reveals practical wisdom transmitted through generations
- Shows inheritance is both physical and behavioural

STANZA 5

I remember her hands folded finally
on white linen, still beautiful
to me, still holding all her stories
that live now in mine.

- "Folded finally" gently suggests death, hands at rest
- "White linen" evokes funeral, peaceful repose
- "Still beautiful" shows continued love transcending physical decline
- "Holding all her stories" presents hands as repositories of experience
- Final line connects generations - mother's stories continue in speaker's hands
- "Live now in mine" suggests both inheritance and responsibility to carry forward

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Inheritance, generational connections, embodied knowledge, memory, maternal care, aging, domestic labour, continuity

Tone: Reflective, tender, reverent, accepting

Key Techniques:

- Extended metaphor (hands as storytellers, birds, maps)
- Rich sensory imagery (tactile, visual, gustatory)
- Similes drawing from nature
- Transformation of domestic activities into significant moments
- Circular structure (ending returns to beginning through generational continuity)

Structure: Five stanzas with varied lengths, moving chronologically from past to present to future inheritance

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The bird imagery in the first stanza primarily suggests the mother's:
A) Desire to escape domestic duties
B) Graceful skill and delicate touch

- C) Flighty and inconsistent nature
D) Connection to the natural world
2. According to the poem, the mother's knowledge of cooking was:
A) Learned from carefully following recipes
B) Passed down through written family traditions
C) Embodied in her hands through experience
D) Constantly being improved through experimentation
3. The line "I knew all their moods and translations" suggests that:
A) The mother was often emotionally unpredictable
B) The speaker could interpret meaning from the mother's hand movements
C) The speaker studied body language as a science
D) The mother used sign language to communicate
4. In stanza three, the comparison of veins to "blue rivers on a relief map" emphasises:
A) The beauty found in aging and wear
B) The mother's poor circulation and health
C) The geographic locations where the mother had lived
D) The painful swelling the mother experienced
5. The speaker's observation about "touching fabric in a shop" illustrates:
A) The family's financial struggles
B) The mother's career in the textile industry
C) How specific gestures and habits pass between generations
D) The speaker's reluctance to become like the mother
-

Answer Key for Poems 4 - 6

"Lamb" by Billy Collins

1. B) A sense of kinship as fellow mammals *The repeated phrase "good to be a mammal" and the speaker's contemplation of shared mammalian experiences indicate a sense of connection rather than pity or superiority.*
2. B) A biblical refrain about creation *The repetition of "good" echoes Genesis where God sees each aspect of creation as "good," creating a parallel between divine and human observation.*
3. C) The human tendency to project our thoughts onto animals *The poem is primarily about how humans project their own thoughts onto animals, as explicitly revealed in the final stanzas.*

4. C) From imaginary projection to simple observation *Stanza 7 shifts from the speaker's imaginative projection of complex thoughts to a recognition of the lamb's simple, instinctual behavior.*
5. B) Humans overthink while animals simply exist *The final stanza contrasts the speaker's complex, recursive thinking with the lamb "just standing there chewing," highlighting how humans complicate what is simple.*

"Drifters" by Bruce Dawe

1. C) This pattern of moving has happened repeatedly *The matter-of-fact future tense and details like the never-unpacked bottling set strongly suggest this is a recurring pattern rather than a first or unusual move.*
2. C) Plans and growth interrupted before completion *The green (unripe) tomatoes symbolize potential that will never be realized in this location, paralleling the family's pattern of leaving before putting down roots.*
3. C) Different degrees of attachment and adaptation to places *The contrast between the oldest daughter (close to tears because "she was happy here") and the youngest (beaming because "she wasn't") reveals their different capacities to form attachments.*
4. B) The family anticipated another move all along *The fact that she "never unpacked" the bottling-set from their previous location suggests she knew they wouldn't stay long at this new place either.*
5. A) A contrast between past hope and present resignation *The final image shows the mother's hopeful attitude when they arrived, contrasting with her current resigned acceptance of another departure.*

"My Mother's Hands" by Joanne Burns

- B) Graceful skill and delicate touch *The bird simile emphasizes the mother's dexterity and gentle expertise in her domestic work, not a desire to escape or other interpretations.*
- C) Embodied in her hands through experience *The line "No recipe was needed, she had the knowledge in her fingers" directly states that her cooking knowledge was intuitive and physical rather than learned from written instructions.*
- B) The speaker could interpret meaning from the mother's hand movements *This line suggests the speaker understood the mother's moods and intentions through the "language" of her hands and their movements.*
- A) The beauty found in aging and wear *The poetic comparison to geographic features presents the aging hands as a landscape with its own beauty and character, despite the physical changes of aging.*

- C) How specific gestures and habits pass between generations *This specific detail illustrates how precise behaviors are inherited—the speaker has unconsciously adopted the mother's exact habit, showing generational continuity.*

Poem 7: "We Are Going" by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of the estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May Be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.

'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.
We are the lightning bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.'

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent
All that remained of their tribe.

- Opens with simple, factual statement establishing Aboriginal people entering a town

- "Semi-naked" contrasts with European clothing norms, suggests cultural difference
- "Subdued and silent" conveys resignation, defeat, loss of power
- "All that remained" indicates decimation, suggesting most of tribe is gone (through disease, violence, displacement)
- Sets tone of loss and cultural destruction

STANZA 2

They came here to the place of their old bora ground
 Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
 Notice of the estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May Be Tipped Here'.
 Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.

- "Bora ground" refers to sacred ceremonial site for initiation and other rituals
- Juxtaposition between sacred site and current mundane usage
- Simile "like ants" reduces colonisers to mindless, busy insects
- Estate agent notice represents ultimate disrespect - sacred ground now designated as rubbish tip
- "Half covers the traces" suggests erasure of culture is ongoing, not yet complete
- Powerfully contrasts Indigenous and colonial values

STANZA 3

'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
 We belong here, we are of the old ways.

- Shifts to first person plural ("We") - collective voice of Indigenous people
- Paradox: Indigenous people feel like strangers on their own land
- "But the white tribe are the strangers" asserts moral truth - Europeans are the real outsiders
- "We belong here" - powerful claim of connection to country
- "Old ways" emphasises ancient, established culture against newcomers

We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
 We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
 We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
 We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.

- Anaphora (repetition of "We are") creates powerful rhythm and builds identity
- People presented as inseparable from their culture, ceremonies, stories
- Reference to "Dream Time" (Dreamtime/The Dreaming) connects to spiritual foundations
- Mixture of serious (ceremonies, laws) and joyful (laughing, games) cultural elements
- Creates sense of rich, complex culture being lost

We are the lightning bolt over Gaphembah Hill
 Quick and terrible,
 And the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow.

We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.

- Shifts to identify people with natural forces and landscape
- Contrasting imagery: lightning (powerful, dramatic) vs. daybreak (gentle, gradual)
- "Gaphembah Hill" uses specific Indigenous place name - assertion of original naming
- Personification of thunder as "that loud fellow" reflects Indigenous storytelling style
- Connection to land presented as fundamental to identity

We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.

We are nature and the past, all the old ways

Gone now and scattered.

- "Shadow-ghosts" creates haunting image of people becoming spectral, disappearing
- Identification with nature emphasises spiritual connection to land
- "Gone now and scattered" acknowledges dispossession and diaspora
- Concludes extended anaphora with stark statement of loss

STANZA 4

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.

The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.

The bora ring is gone.

The corroboree is gone.

And we are going.'

- Shifts anaphora pattern to "gone" - emphasises accumulating losses
- Environmental destruction parallels cultural destruction
- Native animals (eagle, emu, kangaroo) represent connected ecosystem also damaged
- Short, stark statements create sense of finality
- Repetition builds emotional impact through accumulation
- Final line "And we are going" could mean:
 - Physical departure from the place
 - Cultural extinction/disappearance
 - Spiritual journey
- Open-ended, haunting conclusion that suggests but doesn't explicitly state cultural genocide

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Dispossession, cultural erasure, Indigenous identity, colonisation, connection to country, survival and loss

Tone: Dignified, mournful, resolute → haunting

Key Techniques:

- Anaphora (repeated "We are" and "gone")

- Contrast between Indigenous and colonial values
- Natural imagery connecting people to country
- Specific cultural references (bora ground, corroboree, Dreamtime)
- Paradox and juxtaposition
- Progression from third person to first person voice

Structure: Four stanzas with varying lengths, moving from observation to declaration to lament

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The shift from "they" in the first stanza to "we" in later stanzas represents:
 - A) A change in the poem's setting
 - B) A move from objective description to the collective voice of Indigenous people
 - C) The poet's confusion about perspective
 - D) Different groups of Aboriginal people being described
 2. The estate agent's notice about rubbish being tipped on the bora ground most directly symbolises:
 - A) The practical repurposing of unused land
 - B) Environmental concerns in modern Australia
 - C) The colonial disregard for Indigenous sacred sites
 - D) The need for better town planning
 3. When the poem states "We are the corroboree and the bora ground," this suggests that:
 - A) Indigenous people physically resemble these places and ceremonies
 - B) Indigenous identity is inseparable from cultural practices and sacred sites
 - C) The people are simply describing where they live
 - D) These cultural elements are imaginary rather than real
 4. The contrasting images of "lightning bolt" and "quiet daybreak" suggest that Indigenous culture:
 - A) Is dangerously unpredictable
 - B) Contains both powerful, dramatic elements and gentle, nurturing aspects
 - C) Is primarily concerned with weather patterns
 - D) Has no consistent identity
 5. The repeated phrase "is gone" in the final stanza creates:
 - A) A sense of closure and acceptance
 - B) A monotonous rhythm that dulls the emotional impact
 - C) An accumulating weight of loss and erasure
 - D) A hopeful tone about future possibilities
-

Poem 8: "Child" by Sylvia Plath

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate —
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA 1

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

- Opens with direct address to the child
- "Clear eye" suggests innocence, unclouded perception, purity
- "Absolutely beautiful" - superlative indicates intensity of parent's feeling
- Desire to "fill it" reveals parental urge to shape child's experiences
- "Color and ducks" combines abstract and concrete, suggesting variety of experiences
- "Zoo of the new" - playful metaphor for the diverse, exciting world awaiting the child
- Alliteration ("zoo" and "new") creates playful sound

STANZA 2

Whose names you meditate —
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
Little

- "Meditate" suggests child's deep, concentrated observation rather than casual noticing
- Specific natural objects ("April snowdrop, Indian pipe") represent child's growing vocabulary and knowledge
- Items named are delicate, unique natural things - representing beauty in specific details
- "Little" hanging alone creates visual effect of smallness



- Line break after "Little" visually enacts smallness, creates suspense

STANZA 3

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

- "Stalk without wrinkle" continues metaphor of child as fresh, new plant growth
- "Pool" metaphor shifts from plant to water imagery - child's mind as reflective surface
- "Should be grand and classical" reveals parental aspirations and expectations
- Suggests desire to fill child with elevated, timeless experiences and knowledge
- Word "should" introduces tension between ideal and reality

STANZA 4

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.

- "Not this" creates direct contrast with previous ideal
- "Troublous" (unusual form of 'troublesome') suggests deep anxiety
- "Wringing of hands" - physical gesture of distress, worry, helplessness
- "Dark ceiling without a star" - powerful image of depression, hopelessness
- Contrasts sharply with opening's "clear eye" and "color"
- Reveals parent's fear of transmitting anxiety/depression to child
- Final line lacks punctuation, leaving the concern open-ended

Themes & Techniques

Main Themes: Parental love, anxiety about influence, innocence vs experience, hope vs despair, responsibility

Tone: Tender, concerned, protective → anxious

Key Techniques:

- Contrasting imagery (clear/dark, color/colorless, new/troublous)
- Metaphor (eye as pool, child as new growth)
- Enjambment (lines flowing into next stanza)
- Irregular line lengths creating visual effect
- Specific natural imagery

Structure: Four stanzas with decreasing confidence, moving from certainty to anxiety

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The "clear eye" in the opening line most likely represents:
A) The child's physical appearance
B) The child's innocent perception of the world
C) A specific toy the child enjoys
D) The parent's hopeful outlook
2. The line "I want to fill it with color and ducks" reveals the speaker's:
A) Simple desire to entertain the child with toys
B) Wish to expose the child to diverse positive experiences
C) Plan to take the child to an art museum
D) Hope that the child will become a nature artist
3. The structure of the poem moves from:
A) Past to present to future
B) Morning to evening to night
C) Celebration to contemplation to concern
D) Innocence to knowledge to wisdom
4. The "zoo of the new" is best interpreted as:
A) An actual zoo the speaker plans to visit
B) The diverse, exciting world awaiting the child
C) A metaphor for the restrictions of childhood
D) A reference to exotic animals the child has seen
5. The shift that occurs in the final stanza reveals:
A) The speaker's sudden anger toward the child
B) The child's unexpected negative reaction
C) The speaker's anxiety about transferring negative emotions to the child
D) The arrival of nighttime and the end of play

Answer Key for Poems 7 - 8

"We Are Going" by Oodgeroo Noonuccal

1. B) A move from objective description to the collective voice of Indigenous people *The poem shifts from third-person description of Aboriginal people entering town to first-person collective voice expressing their connection to culture and land, creating a powerful shift in perspective.*
2. C) The colonial disregard for Indigenous sacred sites *This jarring detail directly illustrates how colonial society devalues and desecrates what is sacred to Indigenous people, treating ceremonial grounds as merely land for garbage.*

3. B) Indigenous identity is inseparable from cultural practices and sacred sites *Throughout the poem, Indigenous identity is presented not as separate from but constituted by cultural practices, stories, and connection to land - they ARE these elements, not just connected to them.*
4. B) Contains both powerful, dramatic elements and gentle, nurturing aspects *These contrasting natural images show the complexity and range of Indigenous culture, encompassing both dramatic power (lightning) and gentle nurturing (daybreak).*
5. C) An accumulating weight of loss and erasure *The repetition creates a drumbeat of loss, with each statement adding to the emotional impact and sense of mounting cultural erasure.*

"Child" by Sylvia Plath

1. B) The child's innocent perception of the world *The "clear eye" represents the child's unclouded, pure way of seeing the world, contrasted with the adult's troubled perspective.*
2. B) Wish to expose the child to diverse positive experiences *The parent wants to fill the child's vision/mind with varied, colorful, positive experiences rather than with anxiety or darkness.*
3. C) Celebration to contemplation to concern *The poem begins with celebration of the child's beauty, moves through contemplation of what should fill the child's world, and ends with concern about negative influences.*
4. B) The diverse, exciting world awaiting the child *This metaphor represents the varied experiences and discoveries awaiting the child in life, presented as something wondrous like an exotic zoo.*
5. C) The speaker's anxiety about transferring negative emotions to the child *The final stanza reveals the speaker's fear that their own anxiety and depression ("troubled wringing of hands," "dark ceiling") might affect the child.*