

Note to Teachers

Set Poems 2012-2014

Teachers have been speaking about the lack of critical material on some of the literature set pieces (particularly the poems) selected for study at the Caribbean O'Level. Diverse interpretations make an exploration of literary material interesting and expansive.

This guide to the study of 'set' poems is a response to those who wish to be expansive in their analysis and appreciation. It is not intended to be a model commentary but an analysis or interpretation that will stimulate further discussion and analysis.

Some poems are treated with questions. This approach helps to elucidate the central themes or ideas in the poems.

This is a cost free publication offered to teachers.

Prepared by Clifford Narinesingh co - author of A Comprehensive English Course , Books 1-3 and CXC English A.

and author of

Developing Language Skills Books 1,2,3, and CSEC Exam Book 4

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UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING POETRY

DULCE ET DECORUM EST

Theme:

The theme of the poem is the subject with which the poet deals. It is the central idea around which the event or experiences revolve. In this poem, the central idea is the “horrors of war”. The ghastly image of war, the torture to which soldiers are subjected, reflect the theme –

“the haunting flares”, “gas shells dropping”

“froth corrupted lungs” are evidence of the atrocities of war.

INTENTION OF THE POET

What does the poet hope to achieve?

The poet here, wishes to convey a universal message to the reader, that one should not believe that it is noble to die for one’s country, because of the untold miseries which soldiers experience.

To the poet, neither fame nor glory can compensate for the immense suffering that war inflicts on humanity.

MOOD

The mood conveyed in the poem is one of anger, revulsion and disgust.

The impact of the incident in which the soldier is caught in an explosion and the agony he suffers is one of loathing and revulsion.

“I saw him drowning”

“guttering, choking, drowning” shows the immense suffering of a dying soldier.

THE MAIN INCIDENT

The traumatic experience of a soldier who is caught in a sudden explosion while returning to his camp.

IMAGERY

The poet achieves his purpose or intention through his use of intense language and vivid imagery.

These are the similes used by the poet to make the images interesting and meaningful.

1. “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks.”

Here the soldiers returning from the battle field look like old beggars, bent with age and exhaustion, carrying their sacks on their backs. The comparison is appropriate as it appeals to the visual sense and brings the readers face to face with the exhausted soldiers.

2. “knock-kneed, coughing like hags”

The image of the knock-kneed soldiers coughing like hags, shows the terrible effect of the smell of gun powder, and gun shots. It appeals to the auditory sense and reminds the reader of the sounds of old people coughing.

3. “And floundering like a man in fire or lime”

The image presents the soldier in a state of panic, unable to move in any fixed direction as he is trapped in the fire.

The reader can see the movements of the soldier, like a blind man floundering and fumbling to find his way.

4. His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin”

The comparison vividly describes the look of the soldier in agony and pain during the final moments of his death.

LANGUAGE OF THE POEM

These are some examples of the poet’s use of emotive and intense language

“We cursed through sludge”

“limped on blood-shod

“Drunk with fatigue”

“He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning”

“White eyes writhing in his face”

“Froth-corrupted lungs”

The language used is both appropriate and effective and evokes the sympathy of the reader.

THIS IS THE DARK TIME, MY LOVE

The **theme** of this poem is about a people whose dreams of a better life have been

threatened by the destructive power of the ‘strange invader’.

The **atmosphere** of the poem is one of tension, fear, anxiety.

“Everywhere the faces of men are strained and anxious.” This is because of the presence of soldiers: “all around the land brown beetles crawl about.”

Even nature is sympathetic to the cause of the people as expressed in the line “red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.”

The poet’s **mood** is one of lamentation for the misery of his people, the instability and sorrow brought about by the strange invader.

Imagery:

The images appeal to the sense of sight and sound. They present visual pictures that are striking.

The picture of the soldiers, “all around the land brown beetles crawl about”, in their thick armoury, the hard covering on their backs is like beetles.

Here you hear the tramping of soldiers “whose boots of steel tramp down the slender grass”. You can also see the slender grass trampled upon and looking withered.

Figurative Language

Metaphor: All around the land brown beetles crawl about.”

The soldiers are compared to brown beetles.

Personification: “Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.”

The poet gives the flower qualities of a human being - the emotion of sorrow.

Irony: “It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery.”

The words “festival” and “carnival” are indicative of joyous celebrations but what the country is really experiencing is sorrow, not joy.

THE WOMAN SPEAKS TO THE MAN WHO HAS EMPLOYED HER SON

In this poem, a mother expresses her deep affection for her son. She reflects on the unfortunate circumstances of her life as a single parent.

She is now concerned about the welfare of her son.

This woman is seen as one, whose deep devotion and dedication to her son make her transcend her difficulties. Her responsibility to her son takes priority.

But what shatters her now, is the fact that her son is employed by someone who appears to be engaged in shady activities. To her, the gun he carries is a symbol of destructiveness and criminal activities.

The conversational style of the poem makes the reader empathize with the thoughts and feelings of the mother. The reader discerns in the mother, fortitude, resilience and spiritual strength which inform her actions.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. The mood of the poem is one of
 - (a) disgust and anger
 - (b) optimism and hope
 - (c) sadness and despair

3. Which of these words describe the tone of the poem?

formal, conversational, angry, serious?

4. What do the lines “*a metallic tide,*

rising in her mouth each morning”

suggest about the mother?

5. “*He treated all his children*

With equal and unbiased indifference.”

What do the above lines suggest about the father?

6. Why do you think that the mother is upset about the job her son has taken?

7. What do the “black cloth” and “veiled hat” symbolize?

8. Select the line which expresses the mother’s helplessness.

9. Why does she allude to the “thief on the left side of the cross”?

10. How do you feel as you read the poem?

GOD’S GRANDEUR

The poem is expressive of God’s presence in the natural world even though man’s exploits have served to destroy nature and its freshness and purity. To the poet, God’s grandeur is ever pervasive, revealing itself like ‘flame from shook foil’. The word ‘flame’ is significant as it conveys the brilliance of God as the shining light the foil gives off.

The poet employs the image of an electric charge, which develops into a flame or a light suggesting the power of His greatness.

God’s light assumes a richness like the ‘ooze of oil crushed’ or pressed to its finest quality. As the oil gathers strength to richness so too does God’s greatness. The images are all interwoven and expanded to express the grandeur of God.

In stanza 2, though man is aware of God’s greatness, he still exploits it through commerce and industrialization, blemishing the earth and destroying the freshness of nature.

The repetition, ‘generations have trod, have trod, have trod’ conveys man’s persistence in his ruthless exploitation. The persistent repetition of the words ‘have trod’ leading to ‘smeared and bleared’, tells of the poet’s resentment and

disgust at man's actions. 'Man's smudge' and 'smell' are expressive of a polluted and squalid environment, all due to man's uncaring attitude. Unthinking man cares not about the destruction he leaves; he seems not aware of what he has done to nature as expressed in the words 'nor can foot feel being shod.' The natural sensation of walking barefooted is lost.

The language of stanza one (1) lines 5-8, reveals a protest against man's ruthlessness. The poet reacts to man's inhumanity and indignity with reasoned calmness, a protest without rage or anger for he is consoled by nature's presence as described in stanza two (2).

In stanza two(2), the poet tells that God's presence or power through nature is renewable and invigorating in spite of man's destructive nature. Nature is described as indestructible or inexhaustible.

"For all this, nature is never spent
There lives a dearest freshness deep down things."

The poem ends on a positive note, an assurance that springs from the poet's faith as he is convinced of the Holy Ghost's presence with vitality and life and all that is luminous,

"warm breath and bright wings"

GOD'S GRANDEUR

1. Using your own words, express in about two to three lines the theme of the poem.
2. State the central contrast which this poem presents between God and man. Explain it fully with reference to specific details.
3. Select one metaphor used in the poem and show how it is expanded.
4. Explain in your own words the meaning of the following lines.
 - (a) Why do men now not reck his rod?
 - (b) And for all this, nature is never spent.
5. The poet uses the following devices. Select one example of each and comment on its effectiveness:

(a) simile	(b) alliteration	(c) compression	(d) repetition
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ORCHIDS

In this poem, the writer is about to relocate and is sending her material belongings “to fill the empty spaces of her future life”. One thing that cannot be boxed is the sentiment she feels for the orchids. The orchids belong to her emotional and spiritual world. The purple colour is a symbol of the blood of Christ on the Cross.

What is evident in the poem is that some experiences in life can never be forgotten. Even though you may wish to suppress them, like a stubborn orchid, they bloom and blossom.

For the poet, the orchid is an inspiration to the creative instinct. It sends a message, tells a story that reaches poetic dimensions. Even though the pressed orchids become “thin and dried transparency”, she believes that they still are a stimulus for poetic thought.

In the poem, the material world is pitted against the world of nature. The world of nature is constant and eternal.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
 - (a) relocating to a new home
 - (b) nurturing a spray of orchids
 - (c) the poet’s impression of the orchids
2. What is the mood of the poem?
3. From where did the poet get the orchids?
4. What effect have the purple petals on the poet?
6. What was peculiar about the orchids?
7. (a) Explain the meaning of “their thin dried transparency”.
 - (b) Of what value is the “thin dried transparency” to the poet?

SOUTH

Motivated by a deep sense of longing to return to the islands, the poet recaptures in his memory delightful scenes of his native land. He recalls the bright beaches, the fishermen's houses and the sound of the sea which heralded his birth.

The poet has journeyed from the islands to distant lands where his experiences have been different from those in the islands. He has visited stormy cities, felt the sharp slanting sleet and hail and the oppressive shadows of the forest. These are opposed to the warmth of the islands, and the salty brine of the sea.

To the poet, the ocean that surrounds the islands is a symbol of adventure, the freedom of the spirit and the limitless possibilities which reside in its vastness.

In his view, the rivers that form part of his present environs remind him of a life that lacks purpose – he feels resentment for the rivers.

He recalls the refreshing memories of the sea which reflect the harmony between man and nature. He sees the shells, the fishermen's houses, the pebbled path, the fish and the gulls and the white sails. These are the treasures of the islands which he recaptures in the poem. These are the treasures which make him forget the pains, the sorrows and the hatred.

1. State briefly what the poem is about.
2. Where is the experience taking place?
3. Select two images in the poem.

To which sense does each appeal?

4. Select those expressions which show the poet's experiences of hardship.
5. Which literary device does the poet use in each of the following?

'bright beaches blue'

'sharp slanting sleet'

'their flowing runs on like our longing'

'splash'

'white sails slanted seaward'

6. What is the mood or feeling of the poet?

EPITAPH, DREAMING BLACK BOY, THEME for ENGLISH B.

The poems ‘Epitaph’, ‘Dreaming Black Boy’ and ‘Theme for English B’ have similar themes.

They express discrimination and intolerance in human relationships and reflect the denial of the basic human rights of recognition, justice, equality and freedom. The three poems are treated differently.

You will observe that in the poem “Epitaph” the image is vivid, stark and gruesome. Amidst the beauty of the “falling sunlight” and the swaying cane”, the dead body of the slave hung. The image evokes in the reader anger against human brutality and compassion for the fate of the slave. Through the sad tale, the poet achieves his intention of giving the reader insights into the brutality meted out to slaves in their days of enslavement.

The poem is a tribute to the dead slave, and is melancholic in mood and tone.

EPITAPH

1. Describe the image presented in stanza one of the poem.
2. Which of the following best defines the feelings evoked by the image?
 - (a) elation and despair
 - (b) compassion and anger
 - (c) hatred and defeat
 - (d) disappointment and disbelief
3. Identify words and expressions which describe the morning’s atmosphere.
4. The poet compares the swinging body to “a black apostrophe to pain”, most likely because “the swung body”
 - (a) resembled an apostrophe mark.
 - (b) was prominently positioned as a mark symbolizing pain.
 - (c) was at the heart of two elements.
 - (d) was the cause of much agony and pain.

5. Explain the meaning of each of the following expressions:
 - (a) punctuate our island tale
 - (b) brutal sentences
 - (c) anger pauses till they pass away
6. Do you think that the title of the poem is appropriate?
Give a reason to support your answer.
7. Which of the following best expresses the theme of the poem?
 - (a) a sorrowful tale
 - (b) man's inhumanity to man
 - (c) victory and defeat
 - (d) a blot on our history
8. What is the mood experienced throughout the poem?

DREAMING BLACK BOY

In the poem 'Dreaming Black Boy', the boy expresses his thoughts and emotions in abstract images. He dreams and wishes for the rights that should be accorded to all human beings - recognition and love, and the freedom of movement and speech. These images appeal to the emotions and the reader empathizes with the boy who is being denied these rights.

The poem is written in blank verse. This makes the tone of the poem conversational.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
 - (a) disappointment (b) relationships (c) alienation (d) injustice
2. Why do you think the "black boy" has dreams and wishes?
3. What does the boy wish according to stanza one (1) of the poem?
 - (a) opportunity to compete
 - (b) recognition and warmth

- (c) freedom to play
 - (d) to forget his ancestors
4. Why does the boy wish for an opportunity to be educated?
 5. Identify two pieces of evidence which show the boy's feeling of rejection.
 6. Identify the lines in which the boy feels that his freedom of movement and speech have been suppressed.
 7. Who are the "torch throwers" and the "plotters in pyjamas" alluded to in stanza four (4)?
 8. What do you think is the tone of the poem?
 9. (a) What terrible burden does the boy suffer?
(b) What is his attitude to suffering?

Theme for English B

In the poem "Theme for English B" the poet deals with a student's feeling of frustration and disappointment in the society. The thoughts which he expresses on the "page" echo the issues that confront him in an environment of whites. The mind of the student is confused. Though he was born and bred in a society of white people, and educated in a school among whites, yet he feels a sense of alienation.

In the page that he writes, he is justifying his right to acceptance and equality, on the basis that all people share a common natural heritage of instincts, emotions and tastes. He firmly believes that each race impacts on the other and learns from each other.

Perhaps he is questioning whether discrimination should give way to harmony among the races.

1. What does the word "true" in line four (4) - "Then, it will be true", imply?
(a) authenticity (b) reality (c) credibility (d) integrity
2. Identify the aspects of the student's life which seem to make the assignment difficult.

3. The student's page would be based on
 - (a) life at the college
 - (b) his instincts and emotions
 - (c) a resolution of the conflicts in his mind
 - (d) the Harlem experience
4. What does the student wish to say by listing the things he likes?
5. What makes the student and the instructor part of each other?
6. According to the student's page, which of the following statements are True?
 - (a) The page on which the student writes is coloured.
 - (b) Feelings, natural instincts and tastes are manifested by all people.
 - (c) Sometimes whites and coloured cannot tolerate each other.
 - (d) All people are not born equal.
 - (e) Each race impacts on the other and learns from each other.
7. Which words best describe the character of the student?
impulsive, rational, obstinate, compromising, intelligent, outspoken, unbalanced.
8. The poem is written in Blank Verse form. What does this lend to the style and tone of the poem?

TEST MATCH SABINA PARK

1. What is the theme of the poem?
 - (a) Fall from glory
 - (b) An exciting cricket match
 - (c) Reflections of a spectator
 - (d) Failed batsmen
2. Which line in the poem tells that the crowd lacked the spirited response to the match?
3. The speaker is critical of the English batting.

Quote the lines in support of the criticism.

4. Why is the poet's rationale for a dull game not convincing even to himself?
5. What is the "tarnished rosette" which the writer mentions in the last stanza?

Why is it tarnished?

6. The tone of the poem is
(a) sarcastic (b) formal (c) conversational (d) harsh
7. What does the native language of the folk lend to the poem?
8. In this poem you hear two voices.
Whose voices are they?
9. What is meant by the line "Proudly wearing the rosette of my skin"?
10. What insights do you get of the relationship between the English and the native folk from the expression, "Eh white bwoy"?

OL' HIGUE AND LE LOUPGAROU

Many stories of strange supernatural characters derive from the cultural tradition of the folk. These characters form an important part of the folklore brought by the Africans to the West Indies. Some of these have been preserved in narratives and poems.

The character to which this poem 'Ol' Higue' alludes is the 'Soucouyant' whose mission is to draw blood from human beings.

Read the poem.

Discuss the following questions.

1. What image of Ol' Higue does the poet present in stanza one (1)?
2. What complaint does Ol' Higue make in stanza one (1)?

Quote the expressions which support your answer.

3. (a) Why would Ol' Higue be "Burning like cane fire"?
- (b) Why does she have to count a thousand grains?
4. Why is the blood of babies attractive to Ol' Higue?
5. How and when does she perform her "blood-sucking" task?
6. Give one reason why Ol' Higue would love women giving birth.
7. Do you consider Ol' Higue a mysterious character?
8. What feeling does Ol' Higue evoke in you as you read the poem?

LE LOUPGAROU

Read the poem and discuss the following questions based on it.

- 1.(a) What is the "curious talk" alluded to in line one (1) of the poem?
- (b) What does the word "curious" suggest?
2. Who are the "greying women"?
3. Why, do you think, Le Brun was "greeted by slowly shutting jalousies"?
4. Which word describes Le Brun's dress?
5. What, do you think, is the bargain Le Brun made with the fiends?
6. What was responsible for Le Brun's ruin?
7. How did people know that le Brun had changed himself into a dog?
8. What literary device is used in line one(1)?
"A curious tale that threaded through the town".
9. .How do you feel as you read the last two lines of the poem?

You will observe that both poems deal with the supernatural.

The Soucouyant is the counterpart of the Le Loupgarou.

They both make a pact with the devil to engage in mysterious and fiendish dealings.

They both are greedy and are ruined through their greed.

They both evoke fear in the people around them.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Read the poem and discuss the questions based on it.

1. What do you think is the theme of the poem?
 - (a) Behavioural patterns in human relationships.
 - (b) Attitudes of people in a modern age.
 - (c) Loss of culture founded on love, sincerity and goodwill.
 - (d) How people lived long ago.

2. What difference is there in how people laughed long ago and how they laugh now?

3. Give one piece of evidence that shows how people deceive others.

4. Why, do you think, that the poet wears different faces in different contexts?

5. Provide evidence to show that the poet is influenced by the behaviour and attitudes of the new age.

6. Does the poet like the changes in behaviour?
Give reasons to support your answer.

7. Which of the following best expresses the mood of the poet?
 - (a) melancholy (b) disappointment
 - (c) anger (d) reflection

8. What can you infer about the character of the poet?

9. Which of the following lessons can one learn from this poem?
 - (a) Pattern your lives to please others
 - (b) Appearances are often deceptive

- (c) Values should change to suit modern living.
- (d) Be yourself at all times.
- (e) Honesty, love and consideration should guide your actions.

FORGIVE MY GUILT

1. What is the theme of the poem?
 - a) An accident
 - b) A plea for forgiveness
 - c) Two injured birds
 - d) A confused mind
2. What incident is the poet recalling?
3. Where and when did the incident take place?
4. Identify two contrasting images of the birds, before and after the incident occurred.
5. Select images that appeal to the sense of
 - (a) sight
 - (b) sound
 Explain each and say whether it is appropriate or not.
6. Identify two similes in the poem.

Explain each and say whether it is appropriate or not.
7. What mood does the poem evoke in the reader?
8. What are your feelings towards the poet?
9. State the qualities of the poet which you discern in the poem.

TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. What is the intention of the poet?

3. Find two expressions in stanza one (1) which indicate the spectator's response to the athlete's victory.
4. What does the line "Townsmen of a stiller town" suggest about the athlete?
5. Quote two expressions in stanza three (3) which show the poet's view on "glory and laurels".
6. Why would "silence" and "cheers sound the same to the dying athlete?"
7. Write T next to the statements that are true.

By dying young the athlete's glory

- a. died with him.
 - b. is unchallenged on the field.
 - c. does not gain wide acclaim.
 - d. is not worn down by time.
 - e. is suppressed by other runners.
8. The poem best exemplifies
 - a. reflections on the transience of fame and glory.
 - b. a tribute on the demise of a young successful athlete.
 - c. ovation on the victory of a young adult.
 - d. thoughts on life after death.

IT IS THE CONSTANT IMAGE OF YOUR FACE

In this poem, the poet experiences a deep feeling of guilt and remorse.

The poet has framed an image of his beloved whose face is constantly before him, while he is engrossed in a world of his own; a world in which thoughts are like knives, hurling accusations at him. These accusations cut deeply into the poet's consciousness and remind him of his treachery to his native country.

Apparently, the poet has left his native home, having been captivated by the beauty and assurances of his beloved. However, deep in his heart he knows that no other love can lay claim to his loyalty but his homeland which is above

all other loves.

Feelings of remorse and guilt plague the thoughts of the poet. To him, leaving his country is like an act of treason and treachery. Although he prizes his beloved, he pleads for forgiveness from his country whose tenderness matches or surpasses that of the beloved.

1. What do you think is the theme of the poem?
 - (a) The guilt and remorse of a poet
 - (b) Alienation from one's own country
 - (c) The poet's love and loyalty for his native country

2. Describe the mood which the poet experiences throughout the poem. Give suitable quotations in support of your answer.

3.
 - (a) Select one image in the poem.
 - (b) To which sense does it appeal?
 - (c) Explain its importance in the poem.

4.
 - (a) What is the meaning of "my world of knives"?
 - (b) What effect does this world have on the poet?

5. Quote two expressions which show that the poet's love for his country surpasses all other loves.

6. What qualities of the poet's character are revealed in the poem?

WEST INDIES, U.S.A.

In this poem, the poet records his impressions of the Islands from a view, thirty thousand feet above. He sees some of the islands as more prominent than others. Some are more culturally and economically developed as can be seen in his impression of Puerto Rico, with "silver linings in the clouds" and the glitter of San Juan. But to him, each country has its own distinctive features and characteristics, which are highlighted at its terminal.

Against these islands, the poet sees the influence of the United States on Puerto Rico: he sees Puerto Rico as a representation of the United States - "America's backyard". Stringent laws are enforced at its terminal to prevent passengers

from entering without legal documentation. The fear of foreigners who sneak into the island and tarnish the image of the land is well noted by the poet.

He notes the influence of American culture and lifestyle in Puerto Rico. The glitter of the cities pulsating with life is well captured in the “polished Cadillacs” and “Micro chips”.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. (a) Select the simile in the first two lines of the poem.
(b) Explain why the poet makes the comparison,
(c) Do you find it interesting and original? Why?
3. What is the distinctive feature of each of the following terminals?
(a) Port au Prince (b) Piarco (c) Vere Bird
4. Why are all passengers other than those embarking at San Juan, required to stay on the plane?
5. What do you think is “that vaunted sanctuary”?
Why is it considered a vaunted sanctuary?
6. Select three pieces of evidence which show America’s influence on the lifestyle of Puerto Rico.
7. What do you think is the mood of the poem?
8. What is the tone of the poet?

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

The poet records his impressions of the scene at early dawn when no mechanized activity is going on and the air is clean and devoid of smoke. He is touched by the beauty and splendour of the city. Only those whose souls are dull would not be touched by the awe-inspiring scene; the greatness is majestic.

All objects natural or otherwise are now visible because of the glitter of the morning sun which spreads over the landscape. Never before has the poet witnessed such beauty which the splendour of the sun radiates over valley, rock or hills. Not only is the beauty enchanting, but also the peace and calm which the scene has on the mind of the poet: In such an atmosphere even the houses seem asleep and all is still.

In the scene there is no activity. The air is smokeless because the truckers have

not started to pour their emissions into the atmosphere. The poet is deeply impressed and stunned at the calm and beauty of the morning. His exclamation, “Dear God!” tells us that his response has reached spiritual and divine dimension.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. Where and when is the experience taking place?
3. What is the mood of the poet?
4. Select the figure of speech in the first five lines of the poem.
With what does the poet compare the city?
5. Why is the air smokeless?
6. Select lines which show that there is an absence of noise in the scene.
7. What does the poet mean by “the very houses seem asleep”?
8. From the poet’s impressions of the scene, what can you tell of his character?
9. Do you like the poem? Give reasons to support your answer.

A CONTEMPLATION UPON FLOWERS

The poet sees in the flowers a calm and willing acceptance of death – brave and harmless, humble and modest, the flowers are born of the earth and to the earth they return with no resistance.

Unlike the poet, the flowers subject themselves to the natural order and pattern of the universe. They bloom in a particular season and then fall to earth. The poet wishes his life to be perpetually in spring for he fears the winter, the harbinger of death. His pride, vanity and fear make him unwilling to succumb to death.

However, the poet longs to be like the flowers, to smile and look cheerfully at death. He needs to accept death without fear and to make peace with the

inevitable. The wreaths of flowers brighten and sweeten the atmosphere in times of death. The poet wishes to be like the flowers, that his breath will sweeten and perfume his death. Enslaved by pride, vanity and fear, the poet struggles to come to terms with the experience of death.

The poet represents humanity in his fear of death.

The flowers represent Nature and its willing acceptance of death.

1. What do you think is the theme of the poem?
1. Select the qualities in the flowers that the poet admires.
3. What does the expression “that I could gallant it like you” mean?
4. “Embroidered garments” suggest
 - (a) the flowers are very beautiful
 - (b) even the most beautiful are subject to death
 - (c) Nature produces colorful things
 - (d) the petals of the flowers are adorned with a pattern
5. Why does the poet wish his life would be always spring?
6. What two lessons can the flowers teach the poet?
7. What makes it difficult for the poet to accept death?
8. The word which best describes the mood of the poet is
 - (a) joyful
 - (b) sorrowful
 - (c) pensive
 - (d) angry