



**Macmillan Study Companions**

**Sharon R. Wilson-Strann**

**POETRY FOR THE  
CSEC® ENGLISH B EXAMINATION**

**Second edition  
Prescribed list for 2012–2017**



CSEC® is a registered trademark of the  
**Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)**  
POETRY FOR THE CSEC® ENGLISH B EXAMINATION  
is an independent publication and has not been  
authorised, sponsored, or otherwise approved by CXC.





Macmillan Education  
Between Towns Road, Oxford OX4 3PP  
A division of Macmillan Publishers Limited  
Companies and representatives throughout the world

www.macmillan-caribbean.com

ISBN: 978-0-230-41802-8

Text © Sharon R. Wilson-Strann 2011  
Design and illustration © Macmillan Publishers Limited 2011

First published 2008  
This edition published 2011

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers.

These materials may contain links for third party websites. We have no control over, and are not responsible for, the contents of such third party websites. Please use care when accessing them.

Designed by Mike Brain Graphic Design Ltd  
Typeset by E Clicks Enterprise, Malaysia  
Cover design by Clare Webber  
Cover photo by Jenny Palmer

The author and publishers are grateful for permission to reprint the following copyright material:

Bloodaxe Books for the poem 'Dreaming black boy' by James Berry from *Hot Earth Cold Earth*, published by Bloodaxe Books, 1995. Reproduced with permission of Bloodaxe Books;  
University of Pittsburgh Press for the poem 'Epitaph' from *Uncle Time* by Dennis Scott, copyright © 1973. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press;  
Michelle Saywack and Dr Keith Carter for the poem 'This is the dark time, my love' by Martin Carter from *Poems by Martin Carter*, 2006, reproduced with kind permission;  
David Higham Associates and Random House, Inc for the poem 'Theme for English B' by Langston Hughes from *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes, edited by Arnold Rampersad with David Roessel, Associate Editor, copyright © 1994 by the Estate of Langston Hughes. Used by permission of David Higham Associates and Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.;  
University of Illinois Press for the poem 'The Woman Speaks to the Man who has Employed her Son' from *To Us, All Flowers Are Roses: Poems* by Lorna Goodison, copyright © 1995 by Lorna Goodison. Used with permission of the poet and the University of Illinois Press;  
Hazel Simmons-McDonald for the poem 'Orchids' by Hazel Simmons-McDonald, reproduced with kind permission;  
Stewart Brown for the poems 'West Indies, USA' by Stewart Brown, published in *Lugards' Bridge*, 1989 and 'Test Match Sabina Park' by Stewart Brown, published in *Zinder*, 1986. Reproduced with kind permission;  
Harry Chambers Publications for the poem 'A Stone's throw' by Elma Mitchell from *People Etcetera: Poems New and Selected*, by Peterloo Poets, 1987, www.peterloopoets.com, reproduced by permission;  
Oxford University Press for the poem "South" from *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights of Passage, Islands, Masks* (1973), pp. 57–58, copyright © Oxford University Press 1973;  
Peepal Tree Press Ltd for the poem 'Death Came to See Me in Hot Pink Pants' by Heather Royes from *Days and Nights of the Blue Iguana*. Reproduced with permission of Peepal Tree Press Ltd;  
Sandberry Press for the poem 'The Carpenter's Complaint' by Edward Baugh from *It Was the Singing*. Used by permission of the publishers, Sandberry Press;  
Random House, Inc for the poem *My Papa's Waltz* by Theodore Roethke from *Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* by Theodore Roethke, copyright © 1942 by Hearst Magazines, Inc. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.;

These materials may contain links for third party websites. We have no control over, and are not responsible for, the contents of such third party websites. Please use care when accessing them.

Although we have tried to trace and contact copyright holders before publication, in some cases this has not been possible. If contacted, we will be pleased to rectify any errors or omissions at the earliest opportunity.

The author would like to thank Mr Trevor Reynolds for his assistance in reviewing this book.

Printed and bound in Malaysia  
2015 2014 2013 2012 2011  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# Dedication

To my 5th form English B students at Ottos Comprehensive School  
who made me so proud:

Alicia Charles  
Cazzan Christian  
Kamesa ElCock  
Jahisha George  
Patricia Hall  
Huldah Kirby  
Kyiesha Nedd  
Erika Nicholas  
Rohana Smith  
Shalniel Stephens  
Diana Tuitt  
Kurné Williams  
Sheneiza Winclass  
Deidragay Young

# Contents

Preface	vi
Note to Students	vii
<b>Unit 1 Understanding Poetry</b>	1
How to Understand Poetry Part I	1
How to Understand Poetry Part II	4
How to Understand Poetry Part III	7
How to Understand Poetry Part IV	9
<b>Unit 2 The Language Used in Poetry</b>	11
Understanding Imagery Part I	11
Understanding Imagery Part II	14
The Poet's Use of Language Part I	16
The Poet's Use of Language Part II	18
The Poet's Use of Language Part III	21
The Poet's Use of Language Part IV	23
CHECKPOINT 1	25
Poems Prescribed for the 2012–2014 CSEC® English B Examination	27
Poems Prescribed for the 2015–2017 CSEC® English B Examination	28
<b>Unit 3 Analysis of Poems</b>	29
A Contemplation Upon Flowers	29
Once Upon a Time	33
God's Grandeur	38
Dreaming Black Boy	42
Epitaph	47
This is the dark time, my love	50
'Le loupgarou'	53
CHECKPOINT 2	56
To an Athlete Dying Young	57
Dulce et Decorum Est	62
Theme for English B	66
Forgive My Guilt	71

Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802	74
CHECKPOINT 3	78
Because I Could Not Stop for Death	79
The Woman Speaks to the Man who has Employed her Son	82
Orchids	86
West Indies, U.S.A.	89
It is the Constant Image of your Face	94
A Stone's Throw	97
Test Match Sabina Park	102
Ol' Higue	106
South	109
A Lesson for this Sunday	113
Death Came to See Me in Hot Pink Pants	117
CHECKPOINT 4	120
<b>Unit 4 Exam Preparation and Practice</b>	121
Poems Grouped Together According to Similar Themes	121
Suggested Writing Activities	124
General Tips about Essay Writing	125
Tips on Writing the Comparative Essay	127
Sample Questions and Essays	131
Examination Tips for Paper 2, Section B	138
Possible Exam Questions	139
Examination Tips for Paper 1, Section B	141
Practice Questions	142
Biographical Notes	145
Classes of Poetry	149
Glossary of Literary Terms	151
Appendix	157
Bibliography	158

## Preface

I wrote the first edition of *Poetry for the CSEC® English B Examination* in response to students' complaints about how difficult it is for them to understand, appreciate and respond to poetry, especially that from the Caribbean Examination Certificate (CXC) list of poems. This edition has been significantly revised and updated to meet the demands of the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate English (CSEC®) Syllabus. Its objective is to provide all the information students need to obtain the highest level of achievement in the poetry section of Paper I and Paper 2 of the CSEC® English B examination.

Additional sections of this edition include:

- A section on understanding figurative language;
- A section on the poet's use of language;
- Extension activities and useful sources of information for each poem;
- Tips for writing comparative essays;
- Two sample questions and two sample essays, providing a model for students' own writing;
- Exam tips for answering questions on Paper I, Section B of the exam;
- Biographical notes on each poet;
- An expanded glossary of specialist literary terms.

I would be happy to receive feedback from both teachers and students. You may send your e-mail to [poetry\\_studyguide@hotmail.com](mailto:poetry_studyguide@hotmail.com). Alternatively, you may mail your feedback to [poetrystudyguide@live.com](mailto:poetrystudyguide@live.com).

## Note to Students

This is a study companion for you as you prepare for the CSEC® English B examination. By reviewing the material presented here you will be able to strengthen your critical thinking skills as well as deepen your understanding of how to study poems.

The analysis of the poems is not meant to be committed to memory. Although this study guide should be used to increase your understanding of each poem, it is not intended to substitute for the textbooks that you use in the classroom. It is meant to supplement them. You are still required to read each poem on your own and participate in all class discussions and activities.

If you come across terms you do not understand while reading this study guide, check the glossary to find out what they mean.

### Poetry ... Sweet Poetry

Fuels our innate love for rhythm, and rhyme  
Expresses our thoughts, feelings, opinions  
Stimulates our imagination  
Provides a channel for our creativeness  
Reveals the grandeur and eloquence of words  
Can be adapted for the stage  
Facilitates our understanding of our culture and that of others  
Develops critical thinking  
Poetry ... sweet poetry

Sharon R. Wilson-Strann



# Unit 1 Understanding Poetry

## How to Understand Poetry Part I

### Targets

- ⇒ Understanding the content or subject matter of the poem
- ⇒ Identifying and describing characters
- ⇒ Describing the setting
- ⇒ Writing a summary and descriptive paragraphs

### Mastering the Content of the Poem

The first step in studying a poem is to gain an overall idea of what it is about through a rapid reading. Avoid looking at the dictionary or study notes at this first reading since you should be able to understand enough of the poem to get a general idea. Then the poem should be read several times more slowly and carefully. Underline words and phrases you think may be especially important. Make comments in the margins. Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary. Master the content of the poem before you venture to study parts of it or its specific features.

### Activity 1

Read 'A Contemplation Upon Flowers' by Henry King (p. 29) a few times. Write a summary of what the poem is about.

### Identifying and Describing the Characters

The characters in a poem may be *stationary* or *developing*. If the characters are stationary, they may experience changes in their circumstances, but their disposition remains unchanged. If the characters are developing, the circumstances they endure transform their disposition, so that they become, for example, more charitable or more sober than at the beginning of the poem. Ask yourself:

- Are there many characters?
- Are they realistic?
- Who is the main character?
- Who is the speaker/persona?

- Is the speaker/persona present in the poem?
- Is there a hero/heroine? What are his/her main characteristics?
- Are there mystical characters? Does the poet use them effectively?
- What lessons have I learned from the persona or the main character?

### **Activity 2**

Read 'Ol' Higue' by Mark McWatt (p. 106). Write a descriptive paragraph on the main character of the poem.

### **Recognising the Setting**

There are various elements of the setting, which may be evident in any literary piece. These include:

- time (clock, calendar, seasonal and/or historical time);
- place (geographical location);
- weather conditions (sundrenched, showery, stormy etc);
- social and cultural conditions (clothing, language, beliefs, mannerisms, food, religious practices etc);
- atmosphere (the feeling that is created within the poem, for example, pleasant, terrifying, apprehensive).

### **Something to Think About ...**

... In 'Epitaph' by Dennis Scott (p. 47), you will notice that there are both explicit and implicit details about the setting. You learn that a man was hanged one 'clement morning' (an explicit reference to time and weather conditions). The phrases 'cane kept growing' and 'a dead slave or two' (implicit and explicit references) identify the historical period. The phrase 'our island tale' suggests that the poem could have been set in any one of the West Indian islands where the cruel system of plantation slavery once existed. The 'women's / breathing' and the children's 'hushed ... hopscotch joy' implies that there was sorrow, fear and even shock ... an emotionally charged atmosphere.

### **Activity 3**

Read the poem 'Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' by William Wordsworth (p. 74) and write a description of the setting. You may have to research the historical period to which Wordsworth refers. Ask your history teacher for assistance.

## How to Understand Poetry Part II

### Targets

- ⇒ Making a list of some poetic forms
- ⇒ Discovering the themes of a poem
- ⇒ Understanding imagery
- ⇒ Identifying the tone and mood

### Poetic Form

This is also known as poetic genre, category of poetry or class of poetry.

One way a poet may give form to his/her poem is by using rhyme, the repetition of sound, which occurs most often at the end of lines. The rhyme scheme can be marked by assigning letters at the end of lines to show which words rhyme. Some frequently used rhyme schemes are considered typical poetic forms. One example is the sonnet. Another way to determine the form of a poem is by its meter. For instance, blank verse contains lines of iambic pentameter that do not rhyme.

Some poems have neither rhyme scheme nor meter. This is called free verse.

There are many other poetic forms. Some of them will be explained in greater detail.

### Activity 4

Research a few poetic forms such as the limerick, ode, elegy, dramatic monologue and clerihew. Try to create some of these types of poems on your own.

### Theme

The theme is the main idea or central thought of the poem, often conveyed implicitly by the characters, setting, symbols, allusions and other aspects of the poem.

Do not confuse *subject* with *theme*. The subject is the topic, such as death, love, war, identity, racism, poverty, dreams and aspirations, colonialism, heroism, innocence, friendship. However, the theme is the direct or indirect/implied assertion that the poem makes about

the subject. For example, one of the *subjects* of ‘To an Athlete Dying Young’ is death, but the theme emerges from what the poem says about the athlete. The theme is the insight that we gain from reading the poem. One theme is that it is better for an athlete to die before others break his/her record and he/she sees his/her glory fade.

### Activity 5

Read ‘The Woman Speaks to the Man who has Employed her Son’ by Lorna Goodison (p. 82). Identify the subjects and themes of the poem. Write them in a table under the two headings: *Themes* and *Subjects*.

### Imagery

Imagery is the ‘total sensory suggestion’ conveyed by the language of the poem. This includes: auditory/aural (hearing/sound), gustatory (taste), visual (sight), tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), thermal (heat and cold) and kinaesthetic (movement of animals/people). Which of the above type of image is most commonly used by poets? It is possible for a poem to appeal to more than one sense. Ask yourself, ‘To which of my senses does the poem appeal?’

Imagery is also commonly known as figures of speech or figurative language that stimulates your imagination. A figure of speech is a word or phrase that departs from straightforward literal language. Figures of speech are often used for emphasis, freshness of expression or clarity. Something that is challenging to say when using language literally may be expressed more easily through figures of speech.

### Activity 6

Read ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ by Wilfred Owen (p. 62). To which senses does the poem appeal? Give evidence/examples to support your answer.

### Tone and Mood

The tone is the poet’s attitude to the subject being discussed. When reading a poem, we cannot ‘hear’ the speaker. We need to look for particular signals or indicators in the poem to determine the tone. The tone may be sad, happy, serious, humorous, hopeful, despairing,

ironic, condescending, congratulatory, reflective, poignant, detached, unconcerned, disheartened, unsympathetic, sarcastic, ambivalent and so on.

The mood is the emotion that a reader experiences as a result of reading a poem, for example, tender, dreamy, passionate, grave, sad, cheerful, triumphant, spiritual, humorous or pathetic.

### **Activity 7**

Read 'West Indies, U.S.A.' by Stewart Brown (p. 89).

- What is the poet's attitude to the Americans? In other words, what is the tone of the poem?
- What is the mood created in the poem?

# How to Understand Poetry Part III

## Targets

- ⇒ Identifying conflict
- ⇒ Recognising contrast

## Conflict

Generally speaking, conflict refers to the struggle that a character may experience during the course of a poem, such as the four types of conflict listed below.

### 1 Character Versus Character

Conflict between characters can take the form of a fist fight or a battle of wills, wits or opinion.

### 2 Character Versus Nature

A character may have to struggle against elements of nature, such as a hurricane, earthquake or volcano. This tests a character's mental and physical strength and his/her will to live.

### 3 Character Versus Society

A character's principles, traditions, ideas, beliefs, status or even his/her ethnic background may differ so significantly from those of other members of society that conflict results.

### 4 Character Versus Self

This is the mental or spiritual struggle that occurs within a character. It is also known as internal conflict.

## Activity 8

Identify the types of conflict that are evident in each of these poems:

- 'Dreaming Black Boy' by James Berry (p. 42);
- 'Test Match Sabina Park' by Stewart Brown (p. 102);
- 'A Stone's Throw' by Elma Mitchell (p. 97).

## Contrast

Contrast is an effective literary device, which can be evident in:

- the plot, such as when a defeat is closely followed by a victory;

- the characterisation, for instance, when two people are the opposite of each other in some respects, or there is a contrast between the same person's actions on different occasions;
- the descriptions;
- the mood or tone.

### **Activity 9**

- Read 'A Lesson for this Sunday' by Derek Walcott (p. 113) and describe the contrast between the persona's mood in the first stanza with his mood in the final stanza. Why has his mood changed?
- Read 'Once Upon a Time' by Gabriel Okara (p. 33) and describe the contrast between the father and the son in the poem.

## How to Understand Poetry Part IV

### Targets

- ⇒ Recognising the general focus of the poet
- ⇒ Discussing the effect the poem has on you

### General Focus/Purpose

This is the purpose the poet may have for writing a particular poem, including:

- to tell a story;
- to entertain with a fascinating and skilfully told story;
- to give the poet's opinions about an important subject;
- to express an idea;
- to arouse an emotion;
- to describe a person, animal or thing;
- to teach a moral or spiritual truth;
- to give pleasure.

### Activity 10

Read 'God's Grandeur' by Gerard Manley Hopkins (p. 38).  
What is the poet's general focus? Do you agree with him?  
Why/Why not?

### Effect

A poem is personal to each reader. Describe how you have been affected by a poem, for instance, what knowledge and insights you gained, how your mood was affected and so on.

### Activity 11

Read 'Theme for English B' by Langston Hughes (p. 66). Write a paragraph or two about the effect that this poem has on you. These questions may help to guide your response:

- What knowledge or insights have you gained as a result of reading the poem?
- Do you feel any sympathy towards the speaker in the poem? Why/Why not?
- Is the poem disturbing? Give reasons for your answer.

- What aspects of the poem appeal to you?
- How is this poem similar to any poems you have read before?
- Would you like to read other poems written by Hughes?

### **Something to Think About . . .**

- • • Make specific reference to the poem to substantiate your views, arguments and conclusions.