

Power and Conflict Poetry – key information

Prepared introduction: learn and adapt to the exam question

Planning your essay.

1. Which other poem is also about [key focus]?
2. What are the poets' ideas about [key focus] in the poems? Are the ideas the same throughout the poems?
3. Find at least 3 pieces of evidence to show how the poet shows us ideas about [key focus] in the given poem.

Then write up your essay:

Introduction:

What are the poets' feelings about [key focus]?

In "Poem 1", [Poet 1] presents [key focus] as.... We get the impression that....

In ".....[poem you're using to compare]",[the poet's surname] presents [key focus] as We get the impression that....

Form and structure:

[Poet 1] uses [look at rhyme, rhythm, stanza lengths and the narrative voice] to highlight....

Similarly/In contrast, [Poet 2] uses to highlight

Main part of the essay (you need around 3-4 paragraphs of this):

[Poet 1] uses (find a phrase or a technique from the extract) to highlight that (think about **why** that technique has been chosen)

"....."

The word "....." suggests, which makes us think that [Poet 1] wants the reader to

This links/contrasts with in the poem, where.... [Poet 1]'s message is

This links/contrasts with ... in [other poem] where [poet]'s message is....

Conclusion:

What is the main idea of the two poems? How do the poets present their ideas about [key focus]?

War poems	Conflict poems
Charge of the Light Brigade	Ozymandias
Bayonet Charge	London
Exposure	The Prelude
Remains	My Last Duchess
War Photographer	Tissue
Poppies	The Emigrée
Kamikaze	Checking Out Me History
	Storm on the Island

Key themes:

Nature	Ozymandias The Prelude Storm on the Island Kamikaze Exposure
Identity	Poppies Kamikaze Tissue The Emigrée Checking Out Me History
Individual experiences	War Photographer Poppies Kamikaze The Emigrée Checking Out Me History The Prelude My Last Duchess
Culture	Kamikaze Checking Out Me History London Ozymandias Tissue
Place	London The Prelude Kamikaze The Emigrée
Power of individuals	My Last Duchess Kamikaze Ozymandias
Effect of warfare	Bayonet Charge Charge of the Light Brigade Exposure War Photographer Poppies Kamikaze

Past questions:

1. Compare how the poet presents the effects of war in 'Bayonet Charge' and in one other poem from Power and Conflict.
2. Compare how the poet presents ideas about power in 'Ozymandias' and one other poem from Power and Conflict.
3. Compare how the poet explores ways that people are affected by war in 'War Photographer' and one other poem from Power and Conflict.
4. Compare how the poet explores ideas about conflict in 'Bayonet Charge' and one other poem from Power and Conflict.
5. Compare how the poet explores how people are affected by difficult experiences in 'Remains' and one other poem from Power and Conflict.

Sample answer

Compare the ways poets represent the effects of war in 'Poppies' and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

The key ideas of 'Poppies' are based around the emotions of a mother whose son has joined up. Her memories of him intermingle with the sadness she feels at his loss. The idea of loss could be interpreted as her fear of losing him to death, but also her loss of him as a child who is dependent on her. The poem is very much connected with a personal feeling or individual sense of loss, rather than the more generalised poems of the unknown soldier being killed in conflict.

'War Photographer' is similarly a modern poem, which covers the idea of the impact of various conflicts on an individual, again not directly involved in the conflict, but on the sidelines witnessing the impact on others and being incapable of stopping it. Neither 'Poppies' nor 'War Photographer' are based on one specific conflict, in fact the naming of several "Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh." suggests that the impact is transferable to any conflict situation.

The form used in 'Poppies' is irregular, with different length stanzas and no regular rhyme or rhythm patterns. The free form emphasises the idea that the poem is about emotions, feelings and memories, which cannot be easily be contained in a structured fashion. The use of enjambment between the second and third stanzas, "turned into felt,/ slowly melting." suggests that the barriers between the memories of her son as a child and her emotions at his leaving her are intermingled to create the sad feeling of loss. It also echoes the semantic field of textiles: the felt fuses between the layers of material as the layers of emotions build up for the mother.

'War Photographer', on the other hand, has a more regular form, with six lines in each stanza and regular rhyming. Perhaps this might reflect the regular form of the photograph or slide shapes being laid out in front of him, which contrast with the chaos of the scenes of war he has witnessed. The use of the frequent caesuras in both poems: "of my face. I wanted to graze" and "He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays" emphasises the idea that the emotions are stopping the train of thought and preventing the narrators from moving forward in their memories.

Whilst both poems emphasise the impact of conflict on the individual, the use of the first person narrative voice in 'Poppies' gives the impression of a far more personal viewpoint being described. 'War Photographer' is told from the point of view of the third person, which adds some distance for the reader, perhaps putting the reader more in the position of the viewer of the photographs, rather than directly viewing the scenes of conflict.

The themes of 'Poppies' are of loss and memory, but also of the contrast between mother and son. This contrast is highlighted by the use of domestic imagery, for example the frequent references to clothing "yellow bias binding", "tucks, darts, pleats", "turned into felt" emphasising the more homely position of the mother in contrast to the son who is going to go off to explore the world. The focus on the sewn detail in the alliterative noun phrase "yellow bias binding" contrasts with the more brutal and military noun "blockade" previously. Similarly, the list of nouns: "tucks, darts, pleats" describes adjustments that the mother is able to make to the clothing and suggests that she feels powerless to alter the future for her son, unlike the

clothing that she can control. The action of the mother collecting cat hairs "Sellotape bandaged around my hand,/ I rounded up as many cat hairs/ as I could" suggests the futility of trying to sort her son out and the unending effort of a mother's care for him. The use of the verb "bandaged" implies hurt and injury, whilst the "Sellotape", a sticky tape designed to repair and bind items together suggests that she is desperate to keep her son safe from harm. The references to freedom relating to the son's leaving contrast with the closeness and intimacy of the ideas of the second stanza. "the world overflowing/ like a treasure chest", with the verb "overflowing" suggests the impossibility of containing her son and the beauty and excitement that the son feels about leaving. The "song bird" being "released... from its cage" is an obvious metaphor reflecting the idea of letting go and allowing her son to grow up, but is swiftly followed by the image of the "single dove", with its more sinister connotations of mourning.

'War Photographer' contrasts the ideas of home and abroad in its use of imagery. The order of the dark room "spools of suffering set out in ordered rows" contrasts with the chaos of the conflicts "running children in a nightmare heat." The alliteration of the noun phrase "spools of suffering" links the idea of endless rolls of film with the constant suffering existing around the world. The spools roll up neatly and are contained, but the photos obtained from them link directly back to the horrific impact of war on ordinary people. The image of the "running children" links to the famous photograph taken of the girl running from napalm attacks and perhaps references the idea that we can become somewhat immune to these images as they enter mainstream media. This is referenced later in the poem: "The reader's eyeballs prick/with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers", suggesting that the photos impact for a brief moment and then are forgotten, unlike the memories imprinted on the war photographer's mind.

The mood of both poems is reflective and sombre and illustrates the isolation of the impact of witnessing conflict through something (a son or a lens). The mother is left alone, "I traced/ the inscriptions on the war memorial", using her senses to bring back the memories of her son. She listens, hoping to hear "your playground voice" as it catches on the wind and floats away. The use of the second person pronoun "your" makes the reader feel that she is talking directly to her son and wishing desperately that she could keep him as he was – a small child who could be protected. Similarly, the war photographer is alone with his feelings "he is finally alone" at the opening of the poem and metaphorically alone in the plane where he is the only one who has seen all the scenes of conflict. The use of the senses is similarly used to reflect the memories through more than vision "the cries" and "he sought approval/ without words", reflecting the impact of the senses on memory.

The use of metaphor in 'Poppies', "The dove... an ornamental stitch" and "gelled blackthorns" highlights the contrast in the themes of war and domesticity, the dove representing peace after war and the stitch the home life. The gel in the son's hair looking like blackthorns similarly links the nature image of the blackthorns with the domestic image of the son's hair, but also links to the religious idea of Christ's sacrifice through the crown of thorns idea. Religion is similarly used in the simile in the opening stanza of 'War Photographer' to describe the dark room as being like a church – perhaps reflecting the sombre funeral mood of the poem and comparing the photographer creating images from nothing (a Godlike persona).

The effect of both poems is to make the reader consider the impact of war on others, not just the soldiers. The modern idea warfare shows that the impact of conflict still exists in modern life and reminds us that as a society we have not changed much since the conflicts much earlier in history.