GCSE

WJEC GCSE English Language and Literature (Single and Double Award)

Approved by Qualifications Wales

Poetry Anthology: Unit 1 and Unit 5

Teaching from 2025
For award from 2027

Version 4 September 2026



This Qualifications Wales regulated qualification is not available to centres in England.

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Ready for the world.

WJEC would like to thank the students and teachers of Fitzalan High School, Cardiff and Llanwern High School, Newport for their participation in the creation of these covers.

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Unit 1: Relationships

Valentine by Carol Ann Duffy

From a collection of Carol Ann Duffy's poetry published in 1993 this poem uses the giving of an onion as a gift to explore ideas about love and relationships and the commercialisation attached to Valentine's Day in modern times.

Valentine

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love.

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,
if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

Carol Ann Duffy

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Modern Love by Douglas Dunn

This poem is from the collection of work written between 1964 and 1983 by the Scottish poet Douglas Dunn. It is written as a piece of observation about a modern relationship. The poem suggests that the relationship is limited in some ways and quiet, but whether this is positive or negative is left to the reader to decide.

Modern Love

It is summer, and we are in a house

That is not ours, sitting at a table

Enjoying minutes of a rented silence,

The upstairs people gone. The pigeons lull

To sleep the under-tens and invalids,

The tree shakes out its shadows to the grass,

The roses rove through the wilds of my neglect.

Our lives flap, and we have no hope of better

Happiness than this, not much to show for love

But how we are, and how this evening is,

Unpeopled, silent, and where we are alive

In a domestic love, seemingly alone,

All other lives worn down to trees and sunlight,

Looking forward to a visit from the cat.

Douglas Dunn

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Unit 1: Identity

I Come From by Dean Atta

This poem is written by Dean Atta, a British poet of Greek-Cypriot and Caribbean descent. 'I Come From' was written during his time at university in the early 2010s. It explores many ideas including some about inspiration, culture, race and sexuality. It is a celebration of all the many things that can make us who we are.

I Come From

I come from shepherd's pie and Sunday roast
Jerk chicken and stuffed vine leaves
I come from travelling through my taste buds but loving where I live

I come from a home that some would call broken
I come from D.I.Y. that never got done
I come from waiting by the phone for him to call

I come from waving the white flag to loneliness
I come from the rainbow flag and the union jack
I come from a British passport and an ever-ready suitcase

I come from jet fuel and fresh coconut water
I come from crossing oceans to find myself
I come from deep issues and shallow solutions

I come from a limited vocabulary but an unrestricted imagination
I come from a decent education and a marvellous mother
I come from being given permission to dream but choosing to wake up instead

I come from wherever I lay my head
I come from unanswered questions and unread books
Unnoticed effort and undelivered apologies and thanks

I come from who I trust and who I have left
I come from last year and last year and I don't notice how I've changed
I come from looking in the mirror and looking online to find myself

I come from stories, myths, legends and folk tales
I come from lullabies and pop songs, Hip Hop and poetry
I come from griots, grandmothers and her-story tellers

I come from published words and strangers' smiles
I come from my own pen but I see people torn apart like paper
Each a story or poem that never made it into a book.

Dean Atta

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Miz Rosa Rides the Bus by Angela Jackson

This poem about a black woman's journey from slavery to freedom, inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott and written by Angela Jackson, was published in 1998. The story in the poem is fictional but relates to typical events at the time relating to racism and the Jim Crow laws that were in place in the southern states of the USA.

Miz Rosa Rides the Bus

That day in December I sat down
by Miss Muffet of Montgomery.
I was myriad-weary. Feets swole
from sewing seams on a filthy fabric;
tired-sore a pedalin' the rusty Singer;

dingy cotton thread jammed in the eye.
All lifelong I'd slide through century-reams
loathsome with tears. Dreaming my own
silk-self.

It was not like they all say. Miss Liberty Muffet
she didn't
jump at the sight of me.
Not exactly.
They hauled me
away—a thousand kicking legs pinned down.

The rest of me I tell you—a cloud.
Beautiful trouble on the dead December
horizon. Come to sit in judgment.

How many miles as the Jim Crow flies?
Over oceans and some. I rumbled.
They couldn't hold me down. Long.
No.

My feets were tired. My eyes were
sore. My heart was raw from hemming
dirty edges of Miss L. Muffet's garment.
I rode again.

Continued over.

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A thousand bloody miles after the Crow flies
that day in December long remembered when I sat down
beside Miss Muffet of Montgomery.
I said—like the joke say—What's in the bowl, Thief?
I said—That's your curse.
I said—This my way.
She slipped her frock, disembarked,
settled in the suburbs, deaf, mute, lewd, and blind.
The bowl she left behind. The empty bowl mine.
The spoiled dress.

Jim Crow dies and ravens come with crumbs.
They say—Eat and be satisfied.
I fast and pray and ride.

Angela Jackson

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Unit 1: Conflict

The End and the Beginning by Wislawa Szymborska

This poem was published in 1993 and is by Wislawa Szymborska, a female poet from Poland. This poem reflects what is left behind after war and what happens next with rebuilding and the fading of memory over time. It is a war poem that focuses on ordinary people rather than just soldiers or generals.

The End and the Beginning

After every war
someone has to clean up.
Things won't
straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble
to the side of the road,
so the corpse-filled wagons
can pass.

Someone has to get mired
in scum and ashes,
sofa springs,
splintered glass,
and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder
to prop up a wall.
Someone has to glaze a window,
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,
and takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,
and new railway stations.
Sleeves will go ragged
from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,
still recalls the way it was.
Someone else listens
and nods with unsevered head.
But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about
who will find it dull.

Continued over.

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From out of the bushes
sometimes someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects,
someone must be stretched out
blade of grass in his mouth
gazing at the clouds.

Wisława Szymborska (translated by Joanna Trzeciak)

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A Century Later by Imtiaz Dharker

This poem is from a 2014 collection by female Imtiaz Dharker. Born in Pakistan, she grew up in Glasgow. The title refers back to 1914 and the start of the First World War. It can also be seen to refer to the story of Malala Yousafzai and her fight to support the right for education for women. It suggests that violence cannot destroy the mind as easily as it does the body.

A Century Later

The school-bell is a call to battle,
every step to class, a step into the firing-line.
Here is the target, fine skin at the temple,
cheek still rounded from being fifteen.

Surrendered, surrounded, she
takes the bullet in the head

and walks on. The missile cuts
a pathway in her mind, to an orchard
in full bloom, a field humming under the sun,
its lap open and full of poppies.

This girl has won
the right to be ordinary,

wear bangles to a wedding, paint her fingernails,
go to school. Bullet, she says, you are stupid.
You have failed. You cannot kill a book
or the buzzing in it.

A murmur, a swarm. Behind her, one by one,
the schoolgirls are standing up
to take their places on the front line.

Imtiaz Dharker

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Unit 1: The Natural World

Ark by Simon Armitage

Simon Armitage wrote this poem about environmental concerns and change for the naming ceremony of the British Antarctic Survey's new ship RRS Sir David Attenborough in 2019. Armitage found his trip to the Artic Circle to be life changing. The title refers to the biblical story of Noah and the poem refers to sending out the animals to see if the flood has ended.

Ark

They sent out a dove: it wobbled home,
wings slicked in a rainbow of oil,
a sprig of tinsel snagged in its beak,
a yard of fishing-line binding its feet.

Bring back, bring back the leaf.

They sent out an arctic fox:
it plodded the bays
of the northern fringe
in muddy socks
and a nylon cape.

Bring back, bring back the leaf.
Bring back the reed and the reef,
set the ice sheet back on its frozen plinth,
tuck the restless watercourse into its bed,
sit the glacier down on its highland throne,
put the snow cap back on the mountain peak.

Let the northern lights be the northern lights
not the alien glow over Glasgow or Leeds.

A camel capsized in a tropical flood.
Caimans dozed in Antarctic lakes.
Polymers rolled in the sturgeon's blood.
Hippos wandered the housing estates.

Bring back, bring back the leaf.
Bring back the tusk and the horn
unshorn.
Bring back the fern, the fish, the frond and the fowl,
the golden toad and the pygmy owl,
revisit the scene
where swallowtails fly
through acres of unexhausted sky.

Continued over.

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They sent out a boat.
Go little breaker,
splinter the pack-ice and floes, nose
through the rafts and pads
of wrappers and bottles and nurdles and cans,
the bergs and atolls and islands and states
of plastic bags and micro-beads
and the forests of smoke.

Bring back, bring back the leaf,
bring back the river and sea.

Simon Armitage

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Like an Heiress by Grace Nichols

This poem has some features of the sonnet form and was written in 2020 by Grace Nichols. It is about the natural world and the title suggests that we have inherited its beauty. There is a contrast between the damage created outside and the luxury of the hotel in which the speaker of the poem is staying.

Like an Heiress

Like an heiress, drawn to the light of her
eye-catching jewels, Atlantic draws me
to the mirror of my oceanic small-days.
But the beach is deserted except for a lone
wave of rubbish against the seawall -
used car tyres, plastic bottles, styrofoam cups
rightly tossed back by an ocean's moodswings.
Undisturbed, not even by a sea bird,
I stand under the sun's burning treasury
gazing out at the far-out gleam of Atlantic
before heading back like a tourist
to the sanctuary of my hotel room
to dwell in the air-conditioned coolness
on the quickening years and fate of our planet.

Grace Nichols

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Unit 1: Children and Parents

Catrin by Gillian Clarke

This poem by the National Poet of Wales, Gillian Clarke, was part of her second collection, published in 1978. The poem is about a relationship, most likely between mother and daughter. The focus is on a loving struggle and connection between the two, firstly at the child's birth and then ending with a stand-off between mother and grown daughter.

Catrin

I can remember you, child,
As I stood in a hot, white
Room at the window watching
The people and cars taking
Turn at the traffic lights.
I can remember you, our first
Fierce confrontation, the tight
Red rope of love which we both
Fought over. It was a square
Environmental blank, disinfected
Of paintings or toys. I wrote
All over the walls with my
Words, coloured the clean squares
With the wild, tender circles
Of our struggle to become
Separate. We want, we shouted,
To be two, to be ourselves.

Neither won nor lost the struggle
In the glass tank clouded with feelings
Which changed us both. Still I am fighting
You off, as you stand there
With your straight, strong, long
Brown hair and your rosy,
Defiant glare, bringing up
From the heart's pool that old rope,
Tightening about my life,
Trailing love and conflict,
As you ask may you skate
In the dark, for one more hour.

Gillian Clarke

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Coming Home by Owen Sheers

This poem was written by Owen Sheers in 2015. It is about the relationship between a son and his family, and explores how this has changed over time. It is written from the perspective of the son in first person. The poem does not have a rhyme scheme but includes memorable imagery that emphasises the intimate nature of family relationships.

Coming Home

My mother's hug is awkward,
As if the space between her open arms
is reserved for a child, not this body of a man.
In the kitchen she kneads the dough,
flipping it and patting before laying in again.
The flour makes her over, dusting
The hairs on her cheek, smoothing out wrinkles.
*
Dad still goes and soaks himself in the rain.
Up to his elbows in hedge, he works
on a hole that reappears every Winter,
its edges laced with wet wool –
frozen breaths snagged on the blackthorn.
When he comes in again his hair is wild,
and his pockets are filled with filings of hay.
*
All seated, my grandfather pours the wine.
His unsteady hand makes the neck of the bottle
shiver on the lip of each glass;
it is a tune he plays faster each year.

Owen Sheers

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