

Practice questions for Songs of Ourselves Vol 1 (for examination in 2026)

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Song: Love Armed by Aphra Behn

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Love Armed

Song from Abdelazar

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,
Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flowed,
For whom Fresh pains he did Create,
And strange Tyrannic power he showed;
From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,
Which round about, in sport he hurled;
But 'twas from mine he took desire
Enough to undo the Amorous World.

From me he took his sighs and tears,
From thee his Pride and Cruelty;
From me his Languishments and Fears,
And every Killing Dart from thee;
Thus thou and I, the God have armed,
And set him up a Deity;
But my poor Heart alone is harmed,
Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

(Aphra Behn)

How does Behn make *Love Armed* such a striking poem?

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(Aphra Behn)

How does Behn make *Love Armed* such a powerful exploration of love and betrayal?

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A Different History by Sujata Bhatt

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

A Different History

Great Pan is not dead;
he simply emigrated
to India.
Here, the gods roam freely,
disguised as snakes or monkeys;
every tree is sacred
and it is a sin
to be rude to a book.
It is a sin to shove a book aside
with your foot,
a sin to slam books down
hard on a table,
a sin to toss one carelessly
across a room.
You must learn how to turn the pages gently
without disturbing Sarasvati,
without offending the tree
from whose wood the paper was made.

Which language
has not been the oppressor's tongue?
Which language
truly meant to murder someone?
And how does it happen
that after the torture,
after the soul has been cropped
with the long scythe swooping out
of the conqueror's face –
the unborn grandchildren
grow to love that strange language.

(Sujata Bhatt)

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Explore the ways in which Bhatt uses words and images to powerful effect in *A Different History*.

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How does Bhatt explore the impact of colonialism in *A Different History*?

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The Chimney-Sweeper by William Blake

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

The Chimney-Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying 'weep, 'weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father and mother, say?
'They are both gone up to the church to pray.

'Because I was happy upon the heath
And smiled among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

'And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.'

(William Blake)

What makes *The Chimney-Sweeper* such a powerful and memorable poem?

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(William Blake)

How does Blake explore injustice and hypocrisy in *The Chimney-Sweeper*?

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Where I Come From by Elizabeth Brewster

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Where I Come From

People are made of places. They carry with them
hints of jungles or mountains, a tropic grace
or the cool eyes of sea-gazers. Atmosphere of cities
how different drops from them, like the smell of smog
or the almost-not-smell of tulips in the spring,
nature tidily plotted in little squares
with a fountain in the centre; museum smell,
art also tidily plotted with a guidebook;
or the smell of work, glue factories maybe,
chromium-plated offices; smell of subways
crowded at rush hours.

Where I come from, people
carry woods in their minds, acres of pine woods;
blueberry patches in the burned-out bush;
wooden farmhouses, old, in need of paint,
with yards where hens and chickens circle about,
clucking aimlessly; battered schoolhouses
behind which violets grow. Spring and winter
are the mind's chief seasons: ice and the breaking of ice.

A door in the mind blows open, and there blows
a frosty wind from fields of snow.

(Elizabeth Brewster)

Explore the ways in which Elizabeth Brewster uses words and images to vivid effect in this poem.

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A door in the mind blows open, and there blows
a frosty wind from fields of snow.

(Elizabeth Brewster)

How does Brewster powerfully evoke a sense of memory and belonging in *Where I Come From*?

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Report to Wordsworth by Boey Kim Cheng

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Report to Wordsworth

You should be here. Nature has need of you.
She has been laid waste, Smothered by the smog,
the flowers are mute, and the birds are few
in a sky slowing like a dying clock.
All hopes of Proteus rising from the sea
have sunk; he is entombed in the waste
we dump. Triton's notes struggle to be free,
his famous horns are choked, his eyes are dazed,
and Neptune lies helpless as beached as a whale,
while insatiate man moves in for the kill.
Poetry and piety have begun to fail,
As Nature's mighty heart is lying still.
O see the wound widening in the sky,
God is labouring to utter his last cry.

(Boey Kim Cheng)

Explore the ways in which Boey uses words and images to powerful effect in *Report to Wordsworth*.

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(Boey Kim Cheng)

How does Boey convey the destruction of nature in *Report to Wordsworth*?

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Lament by Gillian Clarke

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Lament

For the green turtle with her pulsing burden,
in search of the breeding ground.
For her eggs laid in their nest of sickness.

For the cormorant in his funeral silk,
the veil of iridescence on the sand,
the shadow on the sea.

For the ocean's lap with its mortal stain.
For Ahmed at the closed border.
For the soldier with his uniform of fire.

For the gunsmith and the armourer,
the boy fusilier who joined for the company,
the farmer's sons, in it for the music.

For the hook-beaked turtles,
the dugong and the dolphin,
the whale struck dumb by the missile's thunder.

For the tern, the gull and the restless wader,
the long migrations and the slow dying,
the veiled sun and the stink of anger.

For the burnt earth and the sun put out,
the scalded ocean and the blazing well.
For vengeance, and the ashes of language.

(Gillian Clarke)

Explore the ways in which Gillian Clarke makes *Lament* such a moving poem.

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(Gillian Clarke)

How does Clarke present the devastating impact of war in *Lament*?

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The Cockroach by Kevin Halligan

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

The Cockroach

I watched a giant cockroach start to pace,
Skirting a ball of dust that rode the floor.
At first he seemed quite satisfied to trace
A path between the wainscot and the door,
But soon he turned to jog in crooked rings,
Circling the rusty table leg and back,
And flipping right over to scratch his wings-
As if the victim of a mild attack
Of restlessness that worsened over time.
After a while, he climbed an open shelf
And stopped. He looked uncertain where to go.
Was this due payment for some vicious crime
A former life had led to? I don't know
Except I thought I recognised myself.

(Kevin Halligan)

How does Halligan create such a memorable picture of the cockroach in *The Cockroach*?

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(Kevin Halligan)

How does Halligan use the image of the cockroach to reflect on human behaviour in *The Cockroach*?

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Storyteller by Liz Lochhead

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Storyteller

she sat down
at the scoured table
in the swept kitchen
beside the dresser with its cracked delft.
And every last crumb of daylight was salted away.

No one could say the stories were useless
for as the tongue clacked
five or forty fingers stitched
corn was grated from the husk
patchwork was pieced
or the darning done.

Never the one to slander her shiftless.
Daily sloven or spotless no matter whether
dishwater or tasty was her soup.
To tell the stories was her work.
It was like spinning,
gathering thin air to the singlest strongest
thread. Night in
she'd have us waiting, held
breath, for the ending we knew by heart.

And at first light
as the women stirred themselves to build the fire
as the peasant's feet felt for clogs
as thin grey washed over flat fields
the stories dissolved in the whorl of the ear
but they
hung themselves upside down
in the sleeping heads of the children
till they flew again
in the storytellers night.

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(Liz Lochhead)

In what ways does Liz Lochhead bring the act of storytelling to life in *Storyteller*?

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(Liz Lochhead)

How does Lochhead celebrate the power and importance of stories in *Storyteller*?

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Before the Sun by Charles Mungoshi

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Before the Sun

Intense blue morning
promising early heat
and later in the afternoon,
heavy rain.

The bright chips
fly from the sharp axe
for some distance through the air,
arc,
and eternities later,
settle down in showers
on the dewy grass.

It is a big log:
but when you are fourteen
big logs
are what you want.

The wood gives off
a sweet nose-cleansing odour
which (unlike sawdust)
doesn't make one sneeze.

It sends up a thin spiral
of smoke which later straightens
and flutes out
to the distant sky: a signal
of some sort,
or a sacrificial prayer.

The wood hisses,
The sparks fly.

And when the sun

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finally shows up
in the East like some
latecomer to a feast
I have got two cobs of maize
ready for it.

I tell the sun to come share
with me the roasted maize
and the sun just winks
like a grown-up.

So I go ahead, taking big
alternate bites:
one for the sun,
one for me.
This one for the sun,
this one for me:
till the cobs
are just two little skeletons
in the sun.

(Charles Mungoshi)

How does Mungoshi create such a vivid and memorable picture of a morning in *Before the Sun*?

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This one for the sun,
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(Charles Mungoshi)

How does Mungoshi explore the theme of growing up in *Before the Sun*?

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A Married State by Katherine Phillips

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

A Married State

A married state affords but little ease:
The best of husbands are so hard to please,
This in wifes Carefull faces you may spell,
Tho they desemble their misfortunes well.
A virgin state is crown'd with much content,
It's allways happy as it's innocent,
No Blustering husbands to create your fears,
No pangs of child birth to extort your tears,
No children's crys for to offend your ears,
Few worldly crosses to distract your prayers,
Thus are you freed from all the cares that do
Attend on matrymony and a husband too.
Therefore, madam, be advised by me:
Turn, turn apostate to love's Levity.
Supress wild nature if she dare rebell,
There's no such thing as leading Apes in hell.

(Katherine Phillips)

How does Phillips make *A Married State* such an engaging and memorable poem?

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(Katherine Phillips)

How does Phillips explore the difficulties of marriage in *A Married State*?

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Extract from *An Essay on Man* by Alexander Pope

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Extract from *An Essay on Man*

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest,
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast,
In doubt his mind or body to prefer,
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused or disabused;
Created half to rise and half to fall,
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

(Alexander Pope)

How does Pope make this extract from *An Essay on Man* such a thought-provoking and memorable piece of writing?

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(Alexander Pope)

How does Pope explore the contradictions of human nature in this extract from *An Essay on Man*?

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Carpet Weavers, Morocco by Carole Rumens

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Carpet Weavers, Morocco

The children are at the loom of another world.
Their braids are oiled and black, their dresses bright.
Their assorted heights would make a melodious chime.

They watch their flickering knots like television.
As the garden of Islam grows, the bench will be raised.
Then they will lace the dark-rose veins of the tree-tops.

The carpet will travel in the merchant's truck.
It will be spread by the servants of the mosque.
Deep and soft, it will give when heaped with prayer.

The children are hard at work in the school of days.
From their fingers the colours of all-that-will-be fly
and freeze into the frame of all-that-was.

(Carole Rumens)

How does Rumens create such a vivid and memorable picture of the children in *Carpet Weavers, Morocco*?

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(Carole Rumens)

How does Rumens explore the theme of tradition and creativity in *Carpet Weavers, Morocco*?

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Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

(William Shakespeare)

In what ways does Shakespeare make *Sonnet 18* such a timeless and memorable poem?

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 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

(William Shakespeare)

How does Shakespeare explore the power of poetry to preserve beauty in *Sonnet 18*?

Practice questions for Songs of Ourselves Vol 1 (for examination in 2026)

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Hunting Snake by Judith Wright

Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Hunting Snake

Sun-warmed in this late season's grace
under the autumn's gentlest sky
we walked, and froze half-through a pace.
The great black snake went reeling by.

Head down, tongue flickering on the trail
he quested through the parting grass,
sun glazed his curves of diamond scale
and we lost breath to see him pass.

What track he followed, what small food
fled living from his fierce intent,
we scarcely thought; still as we stood
our eyes went with him as he went.

Cold, dark and splendid he was gone
into the grass that hid his prey.
We took a deeper breath of day,
looked at each other, and went on.

(Judith Wright)

How does Judith Wright create such a vivid and quietly powerful poem in *Hunting Snake*?

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How does Wright explore the relationship between humans and nature in *Hunting Snake*?