***UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 1***

**The Barn**

Threshed corn lay piled like grit of ivory

Or solid as cement in two-lugged\* sacks.

The musty dark hoarded an armoury

Of farmyard implements, harness, plough-socks\*.

The floor was mouse-grey, smooth, chilly concrete.

There were no windows, just two narrow shafts

Of gilded motes\*, crossing, from air-holes slit

High in each gable. The one door meant no draughts

All summer when the zinc\* burned like an oven.

A scythe’s edge, a clean spade, a pitch-fork’s prongs:

Slowly bright objects formed when you went in.

Then you felt cobwebs clogging up your lungs

And scuttled fast into the sunlit yard.

And into nights when bats were on the wing

Over the rafters of sleep, where bright eyes stared

From piles of grain in corners, fierce, unblinking.

The dark gulfed like a roof-space. I was chaff\*

To be pecked up when birds shot through the air-slits.

I lay face-down to shun the fear above.

The two-lugged sacks moved in like great blind rats.

*Seamus Heaney*

*\*two-lugged –* knotted corners of sacks

*\*plough-socks –* cutting blades of a plough

*\*motes –* specks of dust

*\*zinc –* metal sheets used to build the barn

*\*chaff –* outer casing of corn grains

**How does the poet present a sense of fear?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

***UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 2***

**Almost a Conversation**

I have not really, not yet, talked with otter\*

about his life.

He has so many teeth, he has trouble

with vowels.

Wherefore\* our understanding

is all body expression –

he swims like the sleekest fish,

he dives and exhales and lifts a trail of bubbles.

Little by little he trusts my eyes

and my curious body sitting on the shore.

Sometimes he comes close.

I admire his whiskers

and his dark fur which I would rather die than wear.

He has no words, still what he tells about his life

is clear.

He does not own a computer.

He imagines the river will last forever.

He does not envy the dry house I live in.

He does not wonder who or what it is that I worship.

He wonders, morning after morning, that the river

is so cold and fresh and alive, and still

I don’t jump in.

*Mary Oliver*

*\*otter –* an animal that lives mainly in rivers

*\*Wherefore –* As a result of which…

**Explain how the poet presents her thoughts about the otter.**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of form and structure.**

***UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 3***

**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

The free bird leaps

on the back of the wind

and floats downstream

till the current ends

and dips his wings

in the orange sun rays

and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks

down his narrow cage

can seldom see through

his bars of rage

his wings are clipped and

his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings

with fearful trill

of the things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill for the caged bird

sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze

and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees

and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn

and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream

his wings are clipped and his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.

*Maya Angelou*

**Explain how the poet expresses her thoughts and ideas about the birds.**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of form and structure.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 4**

**Tiger Shadows**

I wish I was a tiger in the Indian jungle

The jungle would be my teacher

No school

And the night sky a blackboard smudged with stars

I wish I was a tiger in the Indian jungle

Kitten-curious

I’d pad about on paws big as frying pans

While the monkeys chatted in the trees above me

I’d sniff the damp jungly air

Out of exotic flowers I would make a crown of pollen

If I were a tiger in the Indian jungle

My eyes would glitter among the dark green leaves

My tail would twitch like a snake

I would discover abandoned cities

Where no human feet had trod for centuries

I would be lord of a lost civilization

And leap among the vine-covered ruins

I wish I was a tiger in the Indian jungle

As the evening fell

I’d hum quiet tiger-tunes to which the fireflies would dance

I’d watch the red, bubbling sun

Go fishing with its net of shadows

While the hunters looked for me miles and miles away

I’d lie stretched out in my secret den

I would doze in the strawberry-coloured light

Under the golden stripy shadows of the trees

I would dream a tiger’s dream

*Brian Patten*

**How does the writer convey his thoughts when imagining being a tiger in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 5**

**One Art**

The art of losing isn’t hard to master;

so many things seem filled with the intent

to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster

of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

Then practice\* losing farther, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother’s watch. And look! my last, or

next-to-last, of three loved houses went.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,

some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.

I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.

– Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture

I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident

the art of losing’s not too hard to master

though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

*Elizabeth Bishop*

*\*practice –* Please note the American spelling. English spelling: practise

**How does the writer deal with the subject of loss in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 6**

**My Father, With His Arthritic\* Hands**

My father, with his arthritic hands

Closes his door, picks up the bow\*

Tucks the bit under his chin

Tunes it real low

My father can compete with the world’s best bands

My father plays the violin.

His eyes are dim but the notes are clear

His hearing is faulty but we can hear

The songs that pour out from within

People outside stop to listen

When my father plays the violin.

He opens up another world

Far from stress and pain

I become a child again

As without a word

He picks up the bow, tunes it real low

My father plays the violin.

My father with his arthritic hands

Holds a magnifying glass to his eyes to read

He sits out there under the clear blue skies

Now that he can hardly walk

(Luckily my sisters are there when he needs to talk).

And when it’s dusk and he enters within

Then with his arthritic hands

Father picks up his violin.

*Rani Turton*

*\*Arthritic –* arthritis is a disease causing painful joints

*\*bow –* used to play the violin

**How does the writer convey her feelings about her father in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 7**

**The Rear-Guard**

*(Hindenburg Line, April 1917)*

Groping along the tunnel, step by step,

He winked his prying torch with patching glare

From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.

Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know,

A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed;

And he, exploring fifty feet below

The rosy gloom of battle overhead.

Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw someone lie

Humped at his feet, half-hidden by a rug,

And stooped to give the sleeper’s arm a tug.

‘I’m looking for headquarters.’ No reply.

‘God blast your neck!’ (For days he’d had no sleep.)

‘Get up and guide me through this stinking place.’

Savage, he kicked a soft, unanswering heap,

And flashed his beam across the livid\* face

Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore

Agony dying hard ten days before;

And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound.

Alone he staggered on until he found

Dawn’s ghost that filtered down a shafted stair

To the dazed, muttering creatures underground

Who hear the boom of shells in muffled sound.

At last, with sweat of horror in his hair,

He climbed through darkness to the twilight air,

Unloading hell behind him step by step.

*Siegfried Sassoon*

*\*livid –* discoloured

**How does the writer convey the soldier’s journey in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 8**

**For Heidi with Blue Hair**

When you dyed your hair blue

(or, at least, ultramarine

for the clipped sides, with a crest

of jet-black spikes on top)

you were sent home from school

because, as the headmistress put it,

although dyed hair was not

specifically forbidden, yours

was, apart from anything else,

not done in the school colours.

Tears in the kitchen, telephone-calls

to school from your freedom-loving father:

‘She’s not a punk\* in her behaviour;

it’s just a style.’ (You wiped your eyes,

also not in a school colour.)

‘She discussed it with me first –

we checked the rules.’ ‘And anyway, Dad,

it cost twenty-five dollars.

Tell them it won’t wash out –

not even if I wanted to try.’

It would have been unfair to mention

your mother’s death, but that

shimmered behind the arguments.

The school had nothing else against you;

the teachers twittered and gave in.

Next day your black friend had hers done

in grey, white and flaxen yellow –

the school colours precisely:

an act of solidarity\*, a witty

tease. The battle was already won.

*Fleur Adcock*

*\*punk –* a youth movement of the 1970s, considered by some as rebellious *\*solidarity –* the unity of interests or sympathies

**How does the writer present people as individuals in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 9**

**In Mrs Tilscher's class**

You could travel up the Blue Nile

with your finger, tracing the route

while Mrs Tilscher chanted the scenery.

”Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan.”

That for an hour, then a skittle of milk\*

and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.

A window opened with a long pole.

The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.

This was better than home. Enthralling books.

The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.

Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley\*

faded, like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake.

Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found

she'd left a gold star by your name.

The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved.

A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.

Over the Easter term the inky tadpoles changed

from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs

hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce

followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking

away from the lunch queue. A rough boy

told you how you were born. You kicked him, but stared

at your parents, appalled, when you got back home

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.

A tangible alarm\* made you always untidy, hot,

fractious\* under the heavy, sexy sky. You asked her

how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled

then turned away. Reports were handed out.

You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown

the sky split open into a thunderstorm.

*Carol Ann Duffy*

*\*skittle of milk –* a small bottle of milk

*\* Brady and Hindley –* a couple who murdered children in the 1960s

*\* tangible alarm –* a feeling of tension

*\* fractious -* irritable

**How does the writer present childhood memories in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**

**UNSEEN POEM EXAMPLE 10**

**A BLESSING**

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,

Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.

And the eyes of those two Indian ponies

Darken with kindness.

They have come gladly out of the willows

To welcome my friend and me.

We step over the barbed wire into the pasture

Where they have been grazing all day, alone.

They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness

That we have come.

They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.

There is no loneliness like theirs.

At home once more,

They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.

I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,

For she has walked over to me

And nuzzled my left hand.

She is black and white,

Her mane falls wild on her forehead,

And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear

That is delicate as the skin over a girl’s wrist.

Suddenly I realize

That if I stepped out of my body I would break

Into blossom.

*Charles Wright*

**How does the writer present his thoughts and feelings about the ponies in this poem?**

**In your answer you should consider:**

**• the poet’s descriptive skills**

**• the poet’s choice of language**

**• the poet’s use of structure and form.**