1.3-2b Comprehension: Poetry Set 2: 30-minute Pack

GL ASSESSMENT / CSSE 11+ Entrance English (GL Assessment / CSSE style) · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Kestrel

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). Original poem created for 11+ comprehension practice.

High above the stubble field
it hangs as still as stone,
a comma pinned upon the sky,
watching, waiting, alone.

Its wings are rust and ash and cream,
each feather edged with rain;
two amber eyes like polished beads
that never blink, never wane.

The wind combs through the tawny grass
and whispers where mice creep,
while far below a shrew runs on,
too small, too blind, too deep.

Then suddenly the kestrel drops,
a stone let loose from string,
and talons snap like closing traps
before it lifts its wing.

The evening settles, hushed and grey,
the field breathes out its heat,
and somewhere in the darkening grass
small silence marks defeat.

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1 Look at stanza 3, lines 1 to 2: 'The wind combs through the tawny grass / and whispers where mice creep'. Explain the effect of personifying the wind in this way.

(2)

2 Look at stanza 3, line 4: 'too small, too blind, too deep'. Explain the effect of repeating 'too' three times.

(2)

3 Explain how the pace of the poem changes between stanza 3 and stanza 4, and how the poet's choice of language creates this change.

(2)

4 Look at stanza 4, line 2: 'a stone let loose from string'. Explain what this simile suggests about the kestrel's dive.

(2)

5 Look at stanza 5, line 4: 'small silence marks defeat'. Explain what this line suggests has happened to the shrew.

(2)

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6 Look at stanza 5, line 1: 'The evening settles, hushed and grey'. Explain the effect of the words 'hushed' and 'grey' here.

(2)

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7 Look at stanza 1, line 3: 'a comma pinned upon the sky'. Explain what is meant by this image, including both its literal meaning and what it suggests about the kestrel.

(2)

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8 Look at stanza 2, line 3: 'two amber eyes like polished beads'. Explain the effect of this simile.

(2)

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9 Look at stanza 2, line 1: 'Its wings are rust and ash and cream'. Explain the effect of listing three separate colours here.

(2)

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10 Choose the option that best matches the poem.

(a) What is the poem mainly about? **(1)**

- ☐ A) A field of wheat swaying in the wind
- ☐ B) A bird of prey hunting in a field
- ☐ C) A storm approaching over the coast
- ☐ D) A gardener planting seeds in spring

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11 Choose the option that best matches stanza 3.

(a) What is personified (given human qualities or actions) in stanza 3? **(1)**

- ☐ A) The kestrel
- ☐ B) The wind
- ☐ C) The sky
- ☐ D) The field

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12 Identify one word from stanza 3 that appeals to the sense of sound (hearing).

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(1)

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13 Choose the option that best matches stanza 3.

(a) According to stanza 3, how is the shrew described? **(1)**

- ☐ A) Small, blind and hidden deep in the grass
- ☐ B) Flying above the field
- ☐ C) Larger than the kestrel
- ☐ D) Fast, loud and easy to see

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14 Choose the option that best matches stanza 4.

(a) Which simile describes the kestrel's dive in stanza 4? **(1)**

- ☐ A) 'like polished beads'
- ☐ B) 'small silence marks defeat'
- ☐ C) 'hangs as still as stone'
- ☐ D) 'a stone let loose from string'

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15 Identify one word in stanza 4 that imitates a short, sharp sound (an example of onomatopoeia).

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(1)

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16 Choose the option that best matches stanza 1.

(a) In stanza 1, what is the kestrel doing? **(1)**

- ☐ A) Hanging still in the sky, watching
- ☐ B) Singing loudly above the trees
- ☐ C) Sleeping in a nest
- ☐ D) Flying away from the field

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17 Choose the option that best matches stanza 4.

(a) What happens at the end of stanza 4? **(1)**

- ☐ A) The shrew escapes into a burrow
- ☐ B) The kestrel returns to hang still in the sky
- ☐ C) The kestrel's talons snap shut like closing traps before it lifts its wing
- ☐ D) The kestrel flies away without attacking

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18 Choose the option that correctly describes the poem's structure.

(a) How many stanzas does the poem have, and how many lines are in each stanza? **(1)**

- ☐ A) 4 stanzas of 5 lines each
- ☐ B) 5 stanzas of 4 lines each
- ☐ C) 5 stanzas of 5 lines each
- ☐ D) 6 stanzas of 3 lines each

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19 Identify one single word from stanza 1 that shows the kestrel is not moving.

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.....

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(1)

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20 Choose the option closest in meaning to the word as it is used in the poem.

(a) 'amber' (stanza 2, describing the kestrel's eyes) is closest in meaning to: **(1)**

- ☐ A) bright white
- ☐ B) deep black
- ☐ C) pale blue-grey
- ☐ D) golden-brown or orange-brown

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21 Look at stanza 2, line 4: 'that never blink, never wane'. Explain what 'wane' means as it is used here.

(1)

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22 Choose the option closest in meaning to the word as it is used in the poem.

(a) 'tawny' (stanza 3, describing the grass) is closest in meaning to: **(1)**

- ☐ A) deep purple
- ☐ B) bright green
- ☐ C) golden-brown
- ☐ D) silver-grey

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23 Stanza 1 describes the kestrel as 'as still as stone', and stanza 4 compares its dive to 'a stone let loose from string'. Explain the effect of this repeated image of 'stone' across the poem.

(3)

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24 Explain how the poet uses language and structure across the whole poem to build tension and then release it.

(3)

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Mark scheme · 1.3-2b Comprehension: Poetry Set 2: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 1 Simple comment that the wind is personified, with little or no explanation of effect. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how personifying the wind as gentle and quiet creates a calm mood that contrasts with the sudden violence to come. **2**

Indicative content:

- Giving the wind human actions ('combs', 'whispers') makes it feel gentle, careful and almost affectionate, like a hand moving through hair
- This creates a calm, quiet mood in the middle of the poem, just before the shrew and the kestrel's attack are introduced
- The soft, quiet personification builds tension by contrast, since the reader senses this calm will not last once the kestrel begins to hunt

Question 2

Level 1 Simple comment that 'too' is repeated, with little or no explanation of effect. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how the repeated structure builds a sense of the shrew's vulnerability and creates a rhythm that increases tension. **2**

Indicative content:

- Repeating 'too' three times in a row creates a list-like, building rhythm that draws out the moment before the kestrel attacks
- Each repetition adds another reason why the shrew is vulnerable (its size, its lack of sight, its low position), stacking up its disadvantages
- The steady, repeated pattern increases tension, preparing the reader for the sudden action of stanza 4

Question 3

Level 1 Simple comment that the poem speeds up, with little or no reference to language. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how specific word choices (such as 'suddenly' and 'drops') quicken the pace to mirror the kestrel's action. **2**

Indicative content:

- Stanza 3 is slow and quiet, built from soft, drawn-out actions ('combs', 'whispers', 'creep')
- Stanza 4 opens abruptly with 'Then suddenly', a short, direct phrase that immediately signals a change of pace
- The strong, quick verb 'drops' and the short simile 'a stone let loose from string' create a fast, sudden rhythm that mirrors the kestrel's dive

Question 4

Level 1 Simple comment that the simile shows speed, with little or no further explanation. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how the simile suggests sudden release, weight and force, contrasting with the kestrel's earlier stillness. **2**

Indicative content:

- The image of a stone being 'let loose from string' suggests something heavy that has suddenly been released, after being held back or restrained
- This conveys speed and force, showing the kestrel drops quickly and with weight rather than gliding gently
- It contrasts strongly with the stillness described in stanza 1 ('hangs as still as stone'), showing tension that has been building is now suddenly released

Question 5

Level 1 Simple comment that something has ended, with little or no explanation. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation that the silence suggests the shrew has been caught, with the quietness marking the end of its life or struggle. **2**

Indicative content:

- The word 'silence' suggests all sound and movement in the grass has stopped, where before there was rustling and creeping
- 'Defeat' makes clear that something has been lost or overcome, implying the shrew has been caught by the kestrel
- The quietness contrasts with the earlier sounds of the poem (whispering wind, snapping talons), making the ending feel sudden and final

Question 6

Level 1 Simple comment that the words suggest calm, with little or no explanation. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how 'hushed' and 'grey' create a calm, muted mood that contrasts with the earlier violence of the kestrel's dive. **2**

Indicative content:

- 'Hushed' suggests quietness and stillness returning after the noise and action of the dive
- 'Grey' is a dull, muted colour, suggesting a loss of brightness or energy as evening falls
- Together these words create a calm, subdued mood that strongly contrasts with the sudden violence of stanza 4, showing the field settling back into stillness

Question 7

literal meaning: the kestrel looks like a small, dark, curved mark or shape fixed against the wide sky **B1**

wider effect: the image emphasises how small, still and fixed the kestrel appears against the huge sky, reinforcing its patient watching **B1**

Answer: Literally, the kestrel looks like a small, curved dark mark fixed against the huge sky; the image also emphasises how tiny, still and fixed the bird appears while it patiently watches the field below.

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Question 8

Level 1 Simple identification of the simile (comparing the eyes to beads) with little or no explanation of its effect. **1**

Level 2 Clear identification of the simile with a developed explanation of how it suggests the eyes are hard, shiny and intensely focused. **2**

Indicative content:

- The simile compares the kestrel's eyes directly to 'polished beads', suggesting they are hard, smooth and shiny
- This suggests an intense, unwavering focus or alertness, as though the eyes are fixed and unblinking like an object rather than a living part of the bird
- It reinforces the sense of the kestrel as a patient, watchful predator, linking to 'never blink, never wane' in the same stanza

Question 9

Level 1 Simple comment that several colours are listed, with little or no explanation of effect. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of why listing three separate colours creates a detailed, varied picture of the kestrel's plumage. **2**

Indicative content:

- Listing three separate colours ('rust', 'ash', 'cream') instead of one gives a much more detailed, varied picture of the kestrel's feathers
- The repeated use of 'and' slows the line down, making the reader look closely at each colour in turn, as though studying the bird carefully
- The natural, earthy colours also help camouflage the kestrel against the field, linking to its patient, hidden watching in stanza 1

Question 10

(a) B **B1**

(a) Answer: B) A bird of prey hunting in a field

Question 11

(a) B **B1**

(a) Answer: B) The wind

Question 12

'whispers' (oe), or another accepted sound word such as 'creep' if clearly justified **B1**

Answer: whispers

Question 13

(a) A **B1**

(a) Answer: A) Small, blind and hidden deep in the grass

Question 14

(a) D **B1**

(a) Answer: D) 'a stone let loose from string'

Question 15

'snap' (oe) **B1**

Answer: snap

Question 16

(a) A **B1**

(a) Answer: A) Hanging still in the sky, watching

Question 17

(a) C **B1**

(a) Answer: C) The kestrel's talons snap shut like closing traps before it lifts its wing

Question 18

(a) B **B1**

(a) Answer: B) 5 stanzas of 4 lines each

Question 19

'still' or 'hangs' (oe), or a clear equivalent showing the kestrel is motionless **B1**

Answer: still (or hangs)

Question 20

(a) D **B1**

(a) Answer: D) golden-brown or orange-brown

Question 21

'wane' means to fade, grow weaker or become dimmer (oe) **B1**

Answer: To fade, grow weaker or become dimmer.

Question 22

(a) C **B1**

(a) Answer: C) golden-brown

Question 23

Level 1 Simple comment that 'stone' is used more than once, with little or no explanation of effect. **1**

Level 2 Clear explanation of how the two images are connected, with some reference to the change from stillness to movement. **2**

Level 3 A developed explanation of how the repeated stone image structurally links the poem's opening stillness with its central action, showing tension building and then being released. **3**

Indicative content:

- In stanza 1, comparing the kestrel to a stone emphasises complete stillness, patience and waiting
- In stanza 4, the same image of a stone is used differently, this time being 'let loose', suggesting sudden, forceful release
- The repetition links the two moments structurally, showing that the stillness of stanza 1 was not passive but was building towards the release of energy in stanza 4
- This creates a satisfying sense of tension and release across the whole poem, tying its beginning and central action together with a single, developing image

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Question 24

Level 1 A simple comment that the poem builds tension, with little or no reference to specific techniques or stanzas. **1**

Level 2 A clear explanation with reference to at least one technique or stanza that builds or releases tension. **2**

Level 3 A developed explanation that refers to techniques across at least two different stanzas, clearly showing how tension is built and then released. **3**

Indicative content:

- The still, watching image of the kestrel in stanza 1 ('hangs as still as stone') establishes patience and quiet waiting
- The soft personification of the wind in stanza 3 keeps the mood calm and quiet, holding back tension just before the attack
- The abrupt opening 'Then suddenly' and the stone simile in stanza 4 release this built-up tension in one sudden, forceful action
- The calm, hushed imagery of stanza 5 releases the tension fully, returning the poem to stillness
- The consistent ABCB rhyme scheme and regular quatrain form give the poem a steady, controlled rhythm throughout, even as the content moves from calm to sudden action and back to calm

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