



EP.E81 Comprehension: Poetry Set 8

GL ASSESSMENT / CSSE 11+ Entrance English (GL Assessment / CSSE style) · Calculators not allowed ·
about 40 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

The Kestrel

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

The kestrel hangs against the sky,
A speck of brown on beating wing,
It holds its place, so still, so high,
As if the wind were a held string.
Its amber eyes have found the ground,
Where every blade of grass can hide
A mouse that does not make a sound,
Its fear pressed flat on every side.
The kestrel does not flap or fight,
It rides upon the wind instead,
And holds itself in perfect flight,
A stillness balanced overhead.
Then suddenly the stillness breaks,
It folds its wings and drops like stone,
The startled mouse too late awakes,
To find it is no longer alone.
And then, as swiftly as it came,
The kestrel rises, wings held wide,
The hedgerow settles back the same,
As if no danger waited beside.
For nature keeps no diary here,
No record of the day's small cost,

Only the sky, so wide and clear,

Where one more moment lives, then's lost.

1 Choose the option that best matches the poem.

(a) What is the poem mainly about?

(1)

- ☐ A) A kestrel raising its young in a nest
- ☐ B) A kestrel hunting a mouse in a hedgerow
- ☐ C) A flock of birds flying south for winter
- ☐ D) A farmer scaring birds away from a field

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Choose the option that best matches stanza 1.

(a) In stanza 1, how does the poet describe the kestrel's flight?

(1)

- ☐ A) Diving fast towards the ground
- ☐ B) Flapping wildly against the wind
- ☐ C) Holding completely still in the air
- ☐ D) Circling in wide, lazy loops

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

3 Find and copy one word from stanza 1 that describes the colour of the kestrel.

(Total for Question 3 is 1 mark)

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

(a) 'pressed' (stanza 2, line 8) is closest in meaning to:

(1)

- ☐ A) thrown
- ☐ B) squeezed flat
- ☐ C) painted
- ☐ D) lifted up

(Total for Question 4 is 1 mark)

- 5 Look at stanza 3, line 12: 'A stillness balanced overhead.' Explain what 'balanced' means as it is used here.

(Total for Question 5 is 1 mark)

- 6 Look at stanza 1, line 4: 'As if the wind were a held string.' Explain the effect of this simile.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7 Choose the option that best matches stanza 4.

(a) Which literary device is used in stanza 4, line 14: 'It folds its wings and drops like stone'? (1)

- ☐ A) Simile
- ☐ B) Onomatopoeia
- ☐ C) Rhyme
- ☐ D) Personification

(Total for Question 7 is 1 mark)

- 8 Look at stanza 4, line 14: 'It folds its wings and drops like stone.' Explain the effect of this simile.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9 Find and copy one word from stanza 2 that shows the mouse is frightened.

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

10 Choose the option that best matches stanza 2.

(a) What is hiding in the grass in stanza 2?

(1)

- ☐ A) A bird's nest
- ☐ B) A mouse
- ☐ C) A rabbit
- ☐ D) The kestrel's shadow

(Total for Question 10 is 1 mark)

11 Look at stanza 3, lines 9 to 10: 'The kestrel does not flap or fight, / It rides upon the wind instead.' Explain the effect of this description.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 Look at stanza 1, line 3: 'It holds its place, so still, so high.' Identify the technique used in this line, and explain its effect.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 Choose the option that best matches stanza 4.

(a) According to stanza 4, what happens 'suddenly'?

(1)

- ☐ A) The wind changes direction
- ☐ B) The stillness breaks and the kestrel dives
- ☐ C) The mouse runs away safely
- ☐ D) Another bird arrives

(Total for Question 13 is 1 mark)

14 Find and copy the two words from stanza 4 that show the mouse realises the danger only when it is already too late.

(Total for Question 14 is 1 mark)

- 15** Look at stanza 4, line 16: 'To find it is no longer alone.' Explain the effect of this line, especially the fact that the poet does not directly describe what happens to the mouse.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** Choose the option that best matches stanza 5.

(a) What does the kestrel do in stanza 5, after the dive? (1)

- ☐ A) It flies away and never returns
☐ B) It rises again with its wings held wide
☐ C) It lands on the ground and rests
☐ D) It calls loudly to warn other birds

(Total for Question 16 is 1 mark)

- 17** Find and copy one word from stanza 5 that shows how quickly the kestrel arrived at the start of its dive.

(Total for Question 17 is 1 mark)

- 18** Look at stanza 5, line 19: 'The hedgerow settles back the same.' Explain the effect of this line, thinking about what has just happened in stanza 4.

(Total for Question 18 is 2 marks)

- 19** Look at stanza 6, line 21: 'For nature keeps no diary here.' Explain what the poet means by this line.

(Total for Question 19 is 1 mark)

- 20** How many stanzas does the poem contain, and how many lines are in each stanza?

(Total for Question 20 is 1 mark)

- 21** Identify the rhyme scheme used in each stanza of the poem, and support your answer with one example.

(Total for Question 21 is 1 mark)

- 22** Look at stanza 6, lines 23 to 24: 'Only the sky, so wide and clear, / Where one more moment lives, then's lost.' Explain the effect of ending the poem in this way.

(Total for Question 22 is 2 marks)

- 23** Explain how the poet builds tension across stanzas 3 and 4, from the kestrel's stillness to its dive.

(Total for Question 23 is 3 marks)

- 24** Compare the mood created in stanza 1 with the mood created in stanza 4. How does the poet's choice of language create these different moods?

(Total for Question 24 is 3 marks)

- 25** How does the poet use language and structure to show that nature can be both beautiful and, at times, harsh? Refer to the whole poem in your answer.

(Total for Question 25 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · EP.E81 Comprehension: Poetry Set 8

Question 1

- (a) **B1** B
- (a) **Answer: B) A kestrel hunting a mouse in a hedgerow**

Question 2

- (a) **B1** C
- (a) **Answer: C) Holding completely still in the air**

Question 3

- **B1** 'brown', from stanza 1, line 2
- **Answer: brown**

Question 4

- (a) **B1** B
- (a) **Answer: B) squeezed flat**

Question 5

- **B1** Held steady and even, neither rising nor falling (describing the kestrel's motionless hover)
- **Answer: Held steady and even, neither rising nor falling.**

Question 6

- **Level 1** (1): Simple identification of the simile with little or no explanation of its effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how the simile suggests the kestrel's flight is deliberately controlled and effortlessly steady.
- **Indicative content:**
 - The simile compares the wind holding the kestrel in place to a taut, held string
 - This suggests the kestrel's hovering flight is under complete control, as though it were anchored rather than simply floating
 - It creates an image of remarkable balance and skill, making the kestrel's stillness feel almost impossible

Question 7

- (a) **B1** A
- (a) **Answer: A) Simile**

Question 8

- **Level 1** (1): Simple identification of the simile with little or no explanation of its effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how the simile suggests sudden, heavy, unstoppable speed.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Comparing the kestrel's dive to a dropped stone suggests sudden, straight, unstoppable speed
 - 'Stone' also suggests weight and hardness, contrasting with the light, careful stillness of earlier stanzas
 - The simile makes the moment of attack feel abrupt and dramatic after the slow build-up of stillness

Question 9

- **B1** 'fear', from stanza 2, line 8
- **Answer: fear**

Question 10

- (a) **B1** B
- (a) **Answer: B) A mouse**

Question 11

- **Level 1** (1): Simple comment that the kestrel is not struggling, with little or no explanation of effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how the description suggests effortless mastery of the wind rather than a struggle against it.
- **Indicative content:**
 - 'Does not flap or fight' suggests the kestrel is not straining or struggling against the wind
 - 'Rides upon the wind instead' suggests it works with the wind, using it skilfully rather than fighting it
 - Together the phrases suggest effortless mastery and confidence, making the kestrel seem powerful and in complete control

Question 12

- **Level 1** (1): Correctly identifies the repetition with little or no explanation of its effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Correctly identifies the repetition and clearly explains how it slows the line and emphasises the kestrel's stillness and height.
- **Indicative content:**
 - The technique is the repetition of the word 'so' ('so still, so high')
 - This slows the rhythm of the line, making the reader pause on each description
 - It emphasises just how still and how high the kestrel is holding itself, reinforcing the poem's opening image of complete control

Question 13

- (a) **B1 B**
- (a) **Answer: B) The stillness breaks and the kestrel dives**

Question 14

- **B1** 'too late', from stanza 4, line 15 ('The startled mouse too late awakes')
- **Answer: too late**

Question 15

- **Level 1** (1): Simple comment that the poet does not describe what happens, with little or no explanation of effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how withholding direct description leaves the outcome to the reader's imagination, making the moment more powerful.
- **Indicative content:**
 - The poet does not directly state that the kestrel catches the mouse
 - The gentle, understated phrase 'no longer alone' leaves the outcome to the reader's imagination
 - This makes the moment feel more powerful and slightly unsettling than a direct, graphic description would

Question 16

- (a) **B1 B**
- (a) **Answer: B) It rises again with its wings held wide**

Question 17

- **B1** 'swiftly', from stanza 5, line 17
- **Answer: swiftly**

Question 18

- **Level 1** (1): Simple comment that the hedgerow returns to normal, with little or no explanation of effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how the line contrasts the drama of the dive with the ordinary stillness that follows, suggesting nature carries on regardless.
- **Indicative content:**
 - 'Settles back the same' suggests everything returns to how it was before the dramatic dive
 - This creates a stark contrast with the tension and drama of stanza 4
 - It suggests that, for nature, this dramatic moment is simply ordinary and unremarkable, part of everyday life in the hedgerow

Question 19

- **B1** Nature does not record or remember individual events (accept: what happens goes unnoticed and unrecorded, unlike a diary that keeps track of events)
- **Answer:** Nature does not keep any record of what happens; events like this go unnoticed and are not remembered, unlike entries in a diary.

Question 20

- **B1** 6 stanzas of 4 lines each (24 lines in total)
- **Answer:** 6 stanzas of 4 lines each.

Question 21

- **B1** Identifies the ABAB rhyme scheme (the first and third lines rhyme, and the second and fourth lines rhyme) and supports it with an accurate example, such as 'sky' / 'high' and 'wing' / 'string' in stanza 1
- **Answer:** ABAB: the first and third lines of each stanza rhyme, and the second and fourth lines rhyme, for example 'sky' and 'high' (A), and 'wing' and 'string' (B), in stanza 1.

Question 22

- **Level 1** (1): Simple comment on the final image, with little or no explanation of effect.
- **Level 2** (2): Clear, developed explanation of how the calm, wide final image, combined with the idea of the moment being 'lost', creates a reflective, slightly melancholy ending.
- **Indicative content:**
 - The wide, clear sky suggests calm and vastness, returning to the peaceful opening image of the poem
 - 'Then's lost' suggests the dramatic moment has already faded and been forgotten, just like any other moment in nature
 - Together this creates a quiet, reflective, slightly melancholy ending, leaving the reader thinking about how briefly such dramatic events occur and pass unnoticed

Question 23

- **Level 1** (1): A simple comment that the poem becomes more tense, with little or no reference to specific language.
- **Level 2** (2): A clear explanation with reference to specific language from at least one of the two stanzas.
- **Level 3** (3): A developed explanation referring closely to language from both stanzas, clearly tracking how tension builds and then breaks.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Stanza 3 builds a sense of controlled, held stillness through phrases like 'does not flap or fight' and 'A stillness balanced overhead'
 - This extended stillness creates anticipation, making the reader wait for something to happen
 - Stanza 4 breaks the tension abruptly with 'Then suddenly the stillness breaks' and the simile 'drops like stone'
 - The short, sharp verbs and the sudden change in pace after two stanzas of stillness make the dive feel dramatic and shocking

Question 24

- **Level 1** (1): A simple comment that the moods are different, with little or no reference to specific language.
- **Level 2** (2): A clear comparison with reference to specific words or phrases from at least one of the two stanzas.
- **Level 3** (3): A developed comparison referring closely to language from both stanzas, clearly explaining how word choice creates each contrasting mood.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Stanza 1 creates a calm, controlled mood through words such as 'hangs', 'still' and the simile 'a held string'
 - Stanza 4 creates a sudden, dramatic mood through words such as 'suddenly', 'breaks' and the simile 'drops like stone'
 - The contrast reflects the wider movement of the poem from patient stillness to abrupt action
 - This suggests that the kestrel's calm appearance conceals a sudden, powerful capability

Question 25

- **Level 1** (1-2): Simple, generic comments about nature in the poem with little or no reference to specific language, and little or no reference to more than one stanza.
- **Level 2** (3-4): Some clear understanding, identifying relevant techniques (such as simile, personification or repetition) with accurate quotation, and explaining their effect with reference to at least two stanzas.
- **Level 3** (5-6): A sustained, developed response that tracks both the beauty and the harshness of nature across most or all of the poem, integrates well-chosen quotations, explains the effect of specific techniques precisely, and considers how the calm and dramatic moments combine to create the poem's overall meaning.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Stanza 1 presents the beauty of the kestrel's flight through calm imagery and the simile 'a held string', suggesting elegance and skill
 - Stanza 2 hints at harshness through the mouse's hidden 'fear pressed flat', showing danger already present beneath the calm surface
 - Stanza 4 makes the harshness explicit through the simile 'drops like stone' and the understated ending 'no longer alone', showing nature's sudden, brutal side
 - Stanza 5 returns to calm as 'The hedgerow settles back the same', showing how quickly beauty and normality are restored
 - Stanza 6 reflects on this cycle directly, stating that 'nature keeps no diary', suggesting beauty and harshness are simply part of nature's ordinary, unremarked rhythm
 - The poem's consistent ABAB rhyme scheme and steady four-line stanzas hold both the calm and dramatic moments within the same controlled structure, mirroring nature's own balance of beauty and harshness