2.7 Literature: Poetry Comparison: 1-hour Pack

AQA 8702 · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

Poems

Poem A: Doorstep

Poem written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). Not derived from any published or past-paper text.

She counts the mornings in the creak of hinges,

bacon in the pan though no one's hungry,

the kettle boiled for two, still poured for one,

a coat that hangs like a question on its peg.

I watched him fold his whole room into a bag,

T-shirts pressed flat as pages in a book,

and thought of all the doors I'd held for him,

now just this last one, opening onto rain.

The 158 pulled off at half past eight,

its windows lit like a row of small suns,

and for a moment I could see his face

pressed to the glass, already someone else's.

I went back in and put the kettle on,

because the shape of Tuesday hadn't changed,

because the bread still needed cutting thick,

because love, like bread, is kept for who returns.

Poem B: The Tide Table

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Nan kept the tide times pinned beside the clock,
as if the sea still answered to a name,
ruled columns for the water's coming in,
long after Grandad's boat forgot the way.

She'd walk the harbour wall at half past six,
her headscarf knotted tight against the wind,
counting gulls the way some count their blessings,
reading the swell for words that never came.

Forty years she'd known the numbers by their heart,
high tide at Whitby, low against the slip,
and though the calendar had turned to grey,
she kept the almanac beside her bread.

I found her, once, still totting up the hours,
her finger tracing columns with the tide,
and asked her why she measured what was lost.
She said, the sea comes back. It always has.

1 In 'Doorstep', the poet writes: 'A coat that hangs like a question on its peg.' Explain how this simile helps to present the mother's feelings.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

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2 'Doorstep' is written in four regular four-line stanzas (quatrains). Explain one effect this regular structure has on the reader.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Compare how light and water imagery are used to present hope in the two poems.

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

4 Explain how the tone of 'Doorstep' shifts across the poem.

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

5 Identify one detail in 'Doorstep' and one detail in 'The Tide Table' that each suggest the era or type of community the poem is set in. Explain what each detail suggests about the different pressures of waiting in each context.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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6 Analyse how the poet uses imagery of the sea and tide in 'The Tide Table' to explore feelings of loss and hope.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

7 Compare how the poets structure 'Doorstep' and 'The Tide Table' to shape the reader's response.

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

8 Explain how the tone of 'The Tide Table' shifts across the poem.

(Total for Question 8 is 5 marks)

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9 Compare how the different contexts implied in each poem, a contemporary family send-off and a traditional maritime community, shape the reader's understanding of hope and waiting.

(Total for Question 9 is 6 marks)

10 Compare the overall tone of 'Doorstep' and 'The Tide Table'.

(Total for Question 10 is 6 marks)

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11 Evaluate how effective you find the titles 'Doorstep' and 'The Tide Table' in introducing the ideas of each poem.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 Compare how the poets present the experience of waiting for someone they love in 'Doorstep' and 'The Tide Table'.

In your answer, you should compare:
- the poets' ideas and feelings about waiting and hope
- the methods the poets use to present these ideas
- the effects of these methods on the reader.

You should also consider the different contexts in which the ideas in the poems might be understood.

(Total for Question 12 is 16 marks)

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13 'The Tide Table is a more powerful poem about hope than Doorstep.'
To what extent do you agree?

(Total for Question 13 is 6 marks)

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14 Look closely at 'already someone else's' (Doorstep) and 'the sea comes back. It always has' (The Tide Table). Analyse how the poets use these two short statements to shape meaning, and compare their effects on the reader.

(Total for Question 14 is 5 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.7 Literature: Poetry Comparison: 1-hour Pack

Question 1

Level 2 Clear explanation of how the simile suggests uncertainty or unresolved feeling, supported by relevant textual reference and appropriate use of subject terminology (e.g. simile). **3-4**

Level 1 Simple comment on the simile, which may identify the comparison with little or no explanation of its effect; limited use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- The coat is compared to 'a question' because its owner's future, and whether he will return, feels uncertain to the mother.
- The image suggests the mother's unresolved anxiety and quiet hope, since a question implies something unanswered rather than settled grief.
- Using an everyday, ordinary object (a coat) to carry an abstract feeling reflects the poem's wider method of expressing emotion through domestic detail rather than direct statement.
- Accept any other valid, textually supported interpretation of the simile's effect.

Question 2

Level 2 Clear explanation of an effect of the regular stanza structure, supported by relevant reference to the poem and accurate use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple comment on the structure, with little or no explanation of its effect; limited use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- The regular quatrains reflect the steady, repeated nature of daily routine and ritual, mirroring the mother's ordinary morning habits.
- This regularity contrasts with the disruption caused by her son leaving, suggesting she clings to order and routine as a way of coping with change.
- The controlled form could be read as mirroring the mother's attempt to control her own emotions.
- The final stanza's shift towards a general, almost proverbial statement ('love, like bread, is kept for who returns') provides a sense of resolution within the otherwise unchanging pattern.

Question 3

Level 3 Clear, relevant comparison of light and water imagery, supported by well-chosen textual detail from both poems; clear and accurate use of subject terminology. **5-6**

Level 2 Some relevant comparison of imagery, with some supporting reference from at least one poem; some use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comparison of imagery; simple or generalised references; simple or no use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- In 'Doorstep', the bus windows 'lit like a row of small suns' associate the son's departure with warmth and continuing life, offering a muted, fragile form of hope.
- In 'The Tide Table', the sea's return is a natural, cyclical image of hope built on repetition and long experience rather than a single moment.
- Both poets use natural or everyday phenomena (artificial light, tidal water) to stand in for emotional states that are difficult to express directly.
- The bus light is fleeting and man-made, suggesting a hope that is more momentary or fragile, while the tide is ancient and recurring, suggesting a hope built on endurance and faith over time.
- Both images appear at a significant structural point in each poem (stanza 3 in 'Doorstep'; the final stanza in 'The Tide Table'), giving them particular emphasis.

Question 4

Level 3 Clear, well-supported explanation of how tone shifts across the whole poem, with well-chosen textual reference and accurate use of subject terminology. **5**

Level 2 Some explanation of tone shifting across the poem, with some supporting reference; some use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comment on tone; simple or generalised reference; simple or no use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- The poem opens in a quietly observant, almost list-like tone describing routine ('bacon in the pan though no one's hungry').
- The tone becomes more tender and reflective in stanza 2 as the mother watches her son pack.
- Stanza 3 has a more distant, almost cinematic tone as the bus pulls away and the son is glimpsed 'already someone else's', suggesting emotional distance beginning.
- The final stanza returns to a calm, resolved tone through the repetition of 'because', suggesting acceptance and quiet hope.
- Overall the tone moves from anxious noticing to controlled, hopeful acceptance.

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Question 5

Level 2 Clear identification of relevant contextual detail from each poem, with a clear explanation of what this suggests about the different circumstances of waiting. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple identification of contextual detail from one or both poems, with little or no explanation of its significance. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- 'Doorstep' contains details suggesting a recognisably contemporary setting, such as the numbered '158' bus, implying a child leaving for university or independent life, a common and usually temporary modern separation.
- 'The Tide Table' contains details suggesting an older, maritime working community, such as the tide table itself, 'Whitby', and the reference to 'Grandad's boat', implying a fishing or seafaring tradition where long or permanent separation from loved ones was an accepted risk.
- This difference in context affects the nature of hope in each poem: the mother in 'Doorstep' waits for an expected, near-certain return, while Nan in 'The Tide Table' waits for a return that is far less certain, suggesting a more enduring, tested form of faith.
- Accept any other well-supported contextual detail and explanation.

Question 6

Level 3 Clear, relevant analysis of the sea and tide imagery; selects a range of well-chosen quotations; makes clear and accurate use of subject terminology. **5-6**

Level 2 Some understanding and comment on the sea and tide imagery; selects some appropriate detail; makes some use of subject terminology, not always securely. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comment on the sea and tide imagery; simple references; simple or no use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- The tide is used as an extended metaphor for time, memory and the possibility of return, running through every stanza of the poem.
- 'The sea comes back. It always has' suggests a natural, reliable cycle set against the uncertainty of human loss, offering Nan a form of comfort.
- 'Reading the swell for words that never came' presents the sea as something being searched for meaning or communication, reflecting ongoing grief and longing.
- The technical, precise language of tide tables ('ruled columns', 'high tide at Whitby') contrasts with the emotional content of the poem, suggesting Nan manages her grief through routine and measurement.
- The shift to reported speech in the final line gives the sea an almost human agency and authority, reinforcing the poem's overall message of hope.

Question 7

Level 3 Clear, relevant comparison of structure, supported by well-chosen textual detail from both poems; clear and accurate use of subject terminology. **5-6**

Level 2 Some relevant comparison of structure, with some supporting reference from at least one poem; some use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comparison of structure; simple or generalised references; simple or no use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- Both poems are written in four regular quatrains, which could suggest that routine and ritual are being used as a way of coping with loss or absence.
- Both poems end with a shift into a direct or reported statement of belief ('because love, like bread, is kept for who returns' / 'She said, the sea comes back. It always has'), giving each poem a sense of resolution.
- 'Doorstep' moves chronologically through a single morning (routine, packing, departure, return to routine), while 'The Tide Table' moves between distant past and present, creating a more reflective, layered structure.
- 'The Tide Table' introduces a second narrative voice or observer in its final stanza ('I found her, once...'), creating distance and reflection, whereas 'Doorstep' stays largely in the mother's own voice, giving a more immediate structure.
- Enjambment across lines in both poems (for example, 'I watched him fold his whole room into a bag, / T-shirts pressed flat as pages in a book') mirrors the ongoing, unresolved nature of waiting.

Question 8

Level 3 Clear, well-supported explanation of how tone shifts across the whole poem, with well-chosen textual reference and accurate use of subject terminology. **5**

Level 2 Some explanation of tone shifting across the poem, with some supporting reference; some use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comment on tone; simple or generalised reference; simple or no use of subject terminology. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- The poem opens with a tone of quiet devotion or ritual as Nan pins up the tide times.
- The middle stanzas develop a more melancholy, searching tone, as in 'Reading the swell for words that never came'.
- A warmer, nostalgic tone emerges with 'the numbers by their heart', suggesting deep familiarity built over forty years.
- The final stanza introduces a more intimate, direct tone through dialogue, ending on a quiet, firm note of hope ('the sea comes back. It always has').
- Overall the tone moves from ritual, through grief, to steady faith.

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Question 9

Level 3 Clear, relevant comparison of the different contexts implied by each poem, and their effect on the reader's understanding of hope and waiting, supported by well-chosen reference to both texts. **5-6**

Level 2 Some relevant comparison of context, with some supporting reference from at least one poem. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comment on context, with simple or generalised reference. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- 'Doorstep' implies a recognisably contemporary setting (the numbered '158' bus, a son leaving home), suggesting a common, usually temporary separation associated with growing up and independence.
- 'The Tide Table' implies an older, maritime working community (tide tables, 'Whitby', a fisherman's boat), suggesting a tradition in which long or permanent separation from loved ones was an accepted risk of daily life.
- This difference affects how the reader interprets each poem's hope: the mother's hope in 'Doorstep' concerns a near-certain, everyday return, while Nan's hope in 'The Tide Table' has endured forty years and may be maintained against the evidence, giving it a more poignant, tested quality.
- Both poems nonetheless link their specific contexts to a universal, timeless experience of loving and waiting for someone who is absent, which is part of why the comparison works despite the different settings.
- Well-supported alternative readings of context should be credited.

Question 10

Level 3 Clear, well-supported comparison of overall tone across both poems, with well-chosen quotation used as evidence and a developed personal response. **5-6**

Level 2 Some relevant comparison of tone, with some supporting reference from at least one poem. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comparison of tone; simple or generalised reference. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- Both poems move from an observational, routine-based opening tone towards a more resolved, hopeful tone by their final line.
- 'Doorstep' filters emotion largely through the mother's own first-person voice, giving it an intimate, present tone.
- 'The Tide Table' uses a more distanced narrator, a grandchild figure recalling Nan, giving it a more reflective, retrospective tone that also carries admiration.
- Both poems avoid overt sentimentality, instead using restrained, domestic detail (bread and kettle; almanac and bread) to convey deep feeling, an example of understatement in both texts.
- Some may argue 'The Tide Table' carries a heavier, more melancholic undertone given the greater uncertainty around Grandad's fate, compared with the more everyday, temporary separation in 'Doorstep'.

Question 11

Level 2 Clear evaluation of the effectiveness of both titles, supported by relevant reference to how each connects to the poem's methods and ideas. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple comment on one or both titles, with limited evaluation or explanation. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- 'Doorstep' focuses attention on a threshold, a small domestic space that comes to represent transition and waiting.
- 'The Tide Table' foregrounds a practical, measuring object that becomes an extended symbol for faith and the passage of time.
- Both titles name ordinary objects rather than emotions, matching each poem's restrained, understated method of presenting feeling.
- A convincing evaluation might argue 'The Tide Table' is more effective because it connects directly to the poem's central extended metaphor, while 'Doorstep' is more effective for its focus on one small, resonant moment; either judgement is valid if supported.

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Question 12

Level 4 Exploratory, critical comparison of the poets' ideas and methods, with a sustained overview across both texts; detailed, discriminating analysis integrating precise textual evidence; sophisticated understanding of how meaning is shaped, including relevant consideration of context. **13-16**

Level 3 Clear, relevant comparison of the poets' ideas and methods, supported by well-chosen textual detail; generally convincing analysis of language, structure and form with accurate use of terminology; some relevant awareness of context. **9-12**

Level 2 Some relevant comparison of ideas and methods, supported by relevant textual reference; explanation of language, structure or form is attempted but may be uneven; terminology used with some accuracy. **5-8**

Level 1 Simple, mostly narrative or descriptive comments about the poems, with little comparison; general reference to the text; limited or no use of subject terminology. **1-4**

Indicative content:

- Both poems present hope as something maintained through repeated, everyday ritual rather than through grand statement: 'Doorstep' through continuing routine ('put the kettle on... because the shape of Tuesday hadn't changed'), and 'The Tide Table' through Nan's continued measuring of the tides despite the 'calendar had turned to grey'.
- Both poems close with a generalising statement of belief, giving the reader a sense of resolution: 'love, like bread, is kept for who returns' and 'the sea comes back. It always has'.
- Both use restrained, domestic imagery (bread, kettle, tide table) rather than direct statements of emotion, an AO2 method both poets share to explore feeling indirectly.
- Structurally, both poems use four regular quatrains, suggesting that routine and form itself become a way of managing uncertainty and absence.
- The hope in 'Doorstep' concerns a definite, near-certain return of a son to university or independent life, while the hope in 'The Tide Table' is more ambiguous and enduring, sustained across forty years and possibly against the evidence, since Grandad's return is far less certain.
- Context: 'Doorstep' reflects a recognisably contemporary experience, while 'The Tide Table' evokes an older, maritime working community in which fishing or sailing regularly separated families, giving that poem a stronger sense of inherited tradition and long endurance.
- Both poems could also be read as exploring a universal, timeless experience of waiting for someone loved, a parent for a child and a wife for a husband, rather than being tied to one single historical moment.
- Well-supported alternative lines of comparison, provided they are rooted in close reference to both texts, should be credited.

Question 13

Level 3 Detailed, well-supported evaluation weighing evidence from both poems; sustained, convincing personal judgement; sophisticated use of subject terminology. **5-6**

Level 2 Some evaluation of the statement with relevant evidence from at least one poem; some personal judgement; some use of subject terminology. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited response to the statement; simple or generalised reference; limited or no personal judgement. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- Agreement: 'The Tide Table' may be seen as more powerful because the possible loss of Grandad and forty years of sustained ritual create a greater sense of the cost, and value, of hope.
- Disagreement: 'Doorstep' may instead be judged more powerful due to its immediate, first-person voice and the ordinary relatability of a child leaving home, which many readers can recognise directly.
- A convincing response should reach a clear, supported personal judgement rather than simply describing both poems separately.
- Top answers will directly weigh the two poems against each other, using specific quotations and techniques from both, rather than treating each poem in isolation.

Question 14

Level 3 Sophisticated, perceptive comparison of the two statements, precisely analysing their language and structural function within each poem. **5**

Level 2 Clear analysis of at least one statement, with some relevant comparison of their effects. **3-4**

Level 1 Simple, limited comment on one or both statements, with little comparison. **1-2**

Indicative content:

- 'Already someone else's' uses the possessive to suggest the son now belongs to a new, unknown life or identity, creating a sense of loss even before he has properly left, foreshadowing change.
- The abruptness and ambiguity of the phrase, whose 'someone else' is left unclear, creates unease, contrasting with the calm return to routine in the final stanza.
- 'The sea comes back. It always has' uses short, simple declarative sentences and the present tense to create certainty and finality, functioning almost as folk wisdom or proverb.
- Both phrases carry disproportionate weight for their length and are positioned near a structural turning point, asking the reader to pause on a moment of realisation.
- A sophisticated comparison might note that 'Doorstep"s phrase introduces doubt while 'The Tide Table"s phrase restores certainty, meaning the two statements perform opposite structural functions despite their similar brevity and placement.

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