

The Visitor

*A crumbling churchyard, the sea and the moon;
The waves had gouged out grave and bone;
A man was walking, late and alone...*

*He saw a skeleton on the ground;
A ring on a bony finger he found.*

*He ran home to his wife and gave her the ring.
'Oh, where did you get it?' He said not a thing.*

*It's the loveliest ring in the world,' she said,
As it glowed on her finger. They slipped off to bed.*

*At midnight they woke. In the dark outside,
'Give me my ring!' a chill voice cried.*

*'What was that, William? What did it say?'
'Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away.'*

*'I'm coming!' A skeleton opened the door.
'Give me my ring!' It was crossing the floor.*

*'What was that, William? What did it say?'
'Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away.'*

*'I'm reaching you now! I'm climbing the bed.'
The wife pulled the sheet right over her head.*

*It was torn from her grasp and tossed in the air:
'I'll drag you out of bed by your hair!'*

*'What was that, William? What did it say?'
Throw the ring through the window! THROW IT AWAY!*

*She threw it. The skeleton leapt from the sill,
Scooped up the ring and clattered downhill,
Fainter...and fainter... Then all was still.*

Ian Serraillier

Questions

- 1 Name the characters in the poem. [1 mark]
- 2 Which of these words is not a synonym of 'gouged out':
scoop out excavate hollow out valley [1 mark]
- 3 Summarise the poem in your own words. [2 marks]
- 4 What do you notice about the way the poem is organised? [3 marks]
- 5 Why had the poet chosen to use capitals for THROW IT AWAY? [1 mark]
- 6 How do you think William's wife will react once she's certain the skeleton has gone? [3 marks]
- 7 Compare these stanzas. What do you notice about the pace of the rhythm?
Why do you think the poet has done this?

*A crumbling churchyard, the sea and the moon;
The waves had gouged out grave and bone;
A man was walking, late and alone...*

*It was torn from her grasp and tossed in the air.
'I'll drag you out of bed by your hair!'* [3 marks]
- 8 The poem finishes with the word 'still'. What impression does this give you about the skeleton? [2 marks]
- 9 Ellipses are used to create different effects in the first and last stanza. Explain how they are used. [2 marks]
- 10 Which evidence suggests the house is at the top of a hill? [1 mark]

Teaching assessment

Supporting pupils to read and analyse poetry.

When answering questions about poetry encourage pupils to read the poem at least twice before making a start. After this, encourage pupils to ask themselves what the poem is about; making sure that they think about the title as well as the content of the poem. Pupils are now ready to look for organisational features such as the use of stanzas, rhyme scheme and rhythm. They should mark these on their copy of the poem. Next, encourage pupils to think about the descriptive quality of the poem including the use of vocabulary, description and figurative language. They should underline the important descriptive words and put a circle around any words they are unsure about. They can then look back at the tricky words to try and work out their meaning from the context. Pupils are now ready to start answering questions about the text.

- 1 The wife
The skeleton
The husband
1 mark (Content Domain 2b)
- 2 Valley
1 mark (Content Domain 2a)
- 3 Pupils should try to use their own words to tell the narrative of the poem. Look for key points such as the grave being exposed through the erosion of the waves, William taking the ring, William avoiding his wife's questioning, the appearance of the skeleton, the wife asking what the skeleton said three times, the skeleton's threats, William throwing the ring away and the departure of the skeleton.
2 marks (Content Domain 2c)
- 4 **Expected standard:** Pupils should be able to identify that the poem is structured with an opening stanza of three lines and that this is mirrored in the final stanza, also of three lines. They should also be able to identify that the middle of the poem is structured with 10 sets of rhyming couplets. **1 mark**
Extension: In addition to the above some pupils may note the following organisational features:
 - Whilst the opening and closing stanzas are both of three lines, their structures are not identical e.g.
 - two lines of the opening stanza rhyme (bone, alone) and all three lines of the final stanza rhyme (sill, downhill, still);
 - the first stanza is one sentence separated with semi-colons whilst the final stanza is three separate sentences. **Up to 2 additional marks** (Content Domain 2g)
- 5 **Expected standard:** Pupils should note how the use of capitals reflects William's urgency to be rid of the ring. Some pupils may refer to William's fear of the skeleton, especially after it climbed on the bed.

Whilst the use of capitals indicates that William is shouting, pupils should refer to the fear and urgency that William is feeling. It is not enough to say 'he is shouting'.

1 mark (Content Domain 2g)

Arthur: High King of Britain

Chapter 2: Nobody's Child

I can still see clear in my mind the wild forests of Wales and the wind-blasted mountains above them where I passed my early years. And they were carefree, those years, I had a mother for my best friend, and a father for my constant companion and teacher. He taught me how to hunt, to stalk silently, to kill cleanly. From him I learnt how to handle a hawk, to sweeten in a fox, to hold a bow without a tremble as I pulled it taut, and to use a sword and a spear as a knight should. But from my mother I learnt the great things, I learnt what is right, what is wrong, what should be and what should not be – lessons I am still learning even now, my friend. I never in my life have loved anyone more than my mother, and I think I never hated anyone more than my elder brother Kay. Kay was six years older than I was and the bane of my young life. Time and again he would foist the blame for his own misdeed on to my shoulders, for ever trying to turn Father against me - and in this he often succeeded. I would find myself banished to my room or whipped for something I had not done. I can see now the triumphant sneer in my brother's eyes. But with Mother he was never able to taint me. She would never hear a word against me, from Kay or from Father. She was my constant ally, my rock.

But she died. She died when I was just twelve years old. As she lay on her deathbed, her eyes open and unseeing, I reached out to touch her cheek for the last time. Kay grasped my arm and pulled me back.

'Don't you dare touch her,' he said, eyes blazing. 'She's my mother not yours. You don't have a mother.' I appealed to Father and saw

- 6 **Expected standard:** Pupils should predict the wife's relief that the incident is over. They should refer to the final stanza in supporting this prediction as it implies that all is now calm. "Fainter...and fainter... Then all was still." **1 mark**

Extension: Pupils should draw on information from across the poem in formulating responses reflecting the wife's emotional response to what has happened. Credit should be given to responses referring to negative emotions such as anger or disappointment with William for avoiding the truth about the source of the ring. In doing this, pupils should refer to the line "'Oh, where did you get it?' He said not a thing." Pupils may also refer to "'Give me my ring!' a chill voice cried." As further evidence of how William had stolen the ring and therefore avoided telling his wife the truth.

Credit should also be given to pupils who use the same evidence and predict that the wife feels anger/disappointment/revulsion with William for giving her a dead person's ring.

Some pupils may predict that the wife's emotional response would be based on both of these interpretations of the poem.

2 marks (Content Domain 2e)

- 7 **Expected standard:** Pupils should note the contrast in pace and rhythm between the stanzas provided. They should be able to articulate that the first stanza is slow and calm and the second stanza fast and short. They should be able to support their response by referring to the use of long and short syllables in the first stanza and the use of short syllables only in the second stanza. **2 marks**

Extension: In discussing the effectiveness of this, pupils may be able to explain how the rhythmic combination of short and long syllables in the opening stanza creates a sense of calm. They should contrast this with the fast rhythm in the second stanza created by short syllables, which reflects the pace of the story and the frightening behaviour of the skeleton.

1 additional mark (Content Domain 2g)

- 8 **Expected standard:** Pupils should refer to the stillness of the bedroom scene now the skeleton has left. Their answers should refer to the implication that the skeleton has returned to its grave and will not be coming back to haunt William and his wife. Some pupils may note that being 'still' is exactly what the skeleton will be, once it is back in its grave.

2 marks (Content Domain 2d)

- 9 **Expected standard:** Pupils should refer to the way that in the opening stanza the ellipses are used to introduce the rest of the narrative. In the final stanza they are used to show that the skeleton is getting further and further away from the house. **1 mark**

Extension: Some pupils may also reflect on the way the ellipses in the final stanza to slow down the pace of the narrative and so echo the poet's intention of creating a sense of calm and peace after the calamity of the preceding narrative.

1 additional mark (Content Domain 2g)

- 10 The skeleton 'clattered downhill' suggests that the house is at the top of a hill.

1 mark (Content Domain 2b)