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| 5  10  15 | **Hero Tree Kit Fan**  From the classroom window,  the summer’s aorta revives in the dark  hero tree. Bark ideogram,  ember-tinted, no trace of leaves.  A family of four cicadas homes in  on its tall ebony nakedness:  something for a long summer song.  The white chalk stub U-turns  on the wide blackboard, hissing out  a map of Confucian morphemes:  stone-classics that were chiselled  for *the eye looking straight into the heart*.  Fans spin overhead, ripe dozy hours.  Our heads bow, fishing for cancelled  valleys lost to the Yangtze River Dam. |

**Poetry Remake Competition**

STUDENT’S COPY

**List of Poems and Learning and Teaching Materials for Senior Secondary Division**

“Hero Tree” was published in *Paper Scissors Stone* by Kit Fan, p.20. Copyrights © 2011 by Hong Kong University Press. Reprinted by permission of Hong Kong University Press.

**Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. Comment on the imagery used in Stanza 1? What effect does it create?
3. What lesson do you think the speaker is having? Give supporting evidence.

1. What has happened to the speaker in Stanza 3?
2. How does the title relate to the poem?

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| 5  10  15 | **City Louise Ho**  No fingers claw at the bronze gauze  Of a Hong Kong December dusk,  Only a maze of criss-crossing feet  That enmeshes the city  In a merciless grid.  Between many lanes  Of traffic, the street-sleeper  Carves out his island home.  Or under the thundering fly-over,  Another makes his own peace of mind.  Under the staircase,  By the public lavatory,  A man entirely unto himself  Lifts his hand  And opens his palm.  His digits  Do not rend the air,  They merely touch  As pain does, effortlessly. |

“City” was published in *Incense Tree: Collected Poems of Louise Ho* by Louise Ho, p.45. Copyrights © 2009 by Hong Kong University Press. Reprinted by permission of Hong Kong University Press.

**Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. What is the poem about?
3. What is the mood in Stanza 1? How is the mood created?
4. Contrast is used in the poem to show the solitude of the homeless in Stanzas 2 and 3.

(a) Identity 3 pairs of contrasts. Two examples are provided.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Contrasts** | |
| **Stanza 2** | many lanes of traffic |  |
| **Stanza 2** |  |  |
| **Stanza 3** |  | a man entirely unto himself |

(b) What effects do these contrasts create?

1. What is the theme of the poem?

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| --- | --- |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30 | **Mama Akin Jeje**  The horned glasses –  tortoise-shell, bright and gleaming,  were all that remained  constant;  a shuffle rather than stride;  smooth cheeks caressed  into distant lands’  unknown planes, deep an’ wizened;  warm silica grin conceals  the barbs in back; the  varicose veins  brightly garbed  in *uhuru* caftan.  Of course, much has changed  for the one whose  baked cashew hue  resembles mine.  When I was a child, just before dark, she would  read baby Yemi and me  ancient tales of the mighty sun, the endless  earth, the brilliance of sky.  Now it is I  who sends these tales  in electronic blips  to an old woman  separated from i  by  the setting sun  an endless ocean  and the vastness  of the sky. |

“Mama” was published in *Smoked Pearl: Poems of Hong Kong* by Akin Jeje, pp.21-22. Copyrights © 2010 by Proverse Hong Kong. Reprinted by permission of Proverse Hong Kong.

**Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. Where do you think the speaker’s mother is from?
2. What is the main theme of the poem?
3. What kind of person is the speaker’s mother? Support your answers with textual evidence.
4. In Stanza 2, the speaker mentions “much has changed” (line 14). Identify the change(s) the speaker refers to.
5. Why is “i” in small letter (line 26) in the last stanza?
6. How does the speaker highlight the distance between him and his mother?

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| --- | --- |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40 | **Vanilla in the stars Agnes Lam**  When I was a child,  I used to gaze at the stars above  our garden of roses, jasmine and *lingzhi* by the sea,  wondering how far away they really were,  whether they were shining still at the source  by the time their light reached me …  I was told that everyone was born with a star  which glowed or dimmed with the fortunes of each.  I also heard people destined to be close  were at first fragments of the same star  and from birth went searching for each other.  Such parting, seeking, reuniting might take  three lifetimes with centuries in between.  I had thought all these were but myths …  Now decades later, I read about the life of stars,  how their cores burn for ten billion years,  how towards the end, just before oblivion,  they atomize into nebulae of fragile brilliance –  ultra violet, infra red, luminous white, neon green or blue,  astronomical butterflies of gaseous light  afloat in a last waltz choreographed by relativity,  scattering their heated ashes into the void of the universe …  Some of this cosmic dust falls onto our little earth  carrying hydrocarbon compounds, organic matter  able to mutate into plant and animal life,  a spectrum of elemental fragrances …  Perhaps on the dust emanating from one ancient star  were borne the first molecules of a *pandan* leaf,  a sprig of mint or basil, a vanilla pod, a vine tomato,  a morning frangipani, an evening rose, a lily of the night …  Perhaps our parents or grandparents or ancestors further back  strolling through a garden or a field had breathed in the scents  effusing from some of these plants born of the same star  and passed them on as DNA in the genes of which we were made …  Could that be why, on our early encounters, we already sensed  in each other a whiff of something familiar, why, when we are near,  there is in the air some spark which seems to have always been there,  prompting us to connect our pasts, share our stories even as they evolve …  … till the day when we too burn away into dust  and the aromas of our essence dissipate  into the same kaleidoscope of ether light  to be drawn into solar space by astral winds …  … perhaps to make vanilla in a star to be  before the next lifetime of three? |

*Agnes Lam, 9 May 2008, Rodrigues Court, with reference to Sun Kwok’s book, ‘Cosmic butterflies’*

“Vanilla in the Stars” was first published as:

Lam, Agnes. (2009). Vanilla in the stars. In P. Amato & M. J. Salfran (Eds.), *Nosside 2008: XXIVth Poetry Prize anthology* (pp. 89-92). Reggio Calabria: Centro Studi Bosio, Italy. (Published in English and Italian.)

**Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. Based on the gist of the given stanzas and the development of ideas in the poem, match the two columns and put the letters in the brackets provided.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Stanzas 3 - 4 | ( ) | 1. The speaker’s imaginative and creative expansion of the myths and facts |
| Stanzas 5 - 7 | ( ) | 1. Myths about stars the speaker heard as a child |
| Stanzas 8-10 | ( ) | 1. Facts about stars the speaker finds out as a grown-up |

1. What are some of the myths and beliefs about stars the speaker came across when she was a child?
2. As the speaker grows up, what does she understand about the life of stars? Explain two facts about stars she finds out in your own words.
3. Why are scientific terms used in the poem? What effects does this create?
4. (a) Comment on form and use of language in the last stanza.

(b) What do you think “to make vanilla in a star to be before the next lifetime of three” means?

1. What is the theme and message of this poem?

**The Calligrapher Mary Jean Chan**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5  10  15 | Try grasping a piece of wood  between your thumb, middle  & ring finger – as if the drip-  dripping of ink was a typhoon  you could play in. Loosen the  right wrist, scrape the weight  of too-much from brush/heart  across ink bowl; let its round  rim reassure. Sculpt the brush-  tip till shrill: sharp as papercut.  Let ink seep: a dot, a line, then  a mad dash to the last stroke till  interlocking arms form terraced  paddies bursting with meaning:  the character fortune made up of  the shirt on your back, the roof  over your head & the promise  of a stomach satisfied with rice. |  | 20  25  30  35 | When people ask why, reply:  my mother wished I would  write with the grace of those  ancient Chinese poets whose  tapestry now slips easily from  my ten-year-old tongue into a  diptych of shapes. Hour upon  hour, my wrist aches as the ink  dries to a crust. My eyes blink  back water, but this is precisely  the moment to continue. Once  more the fingers dip, slide, lift.  I am not a dancer, but this is a  dance. Hours spill into a pot of  tea leaves as my mother tells me:  See how Chinese characters are  sunflowers that seek out the eyes.  Seeds of ink unfurl suddenly from  your wrist, blooming into time – |

“The Calligrapher” was published in *Flèche* by Mary Jean Chan, pp.28-29. Copyrights © 2019 by Faber & Faber Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd, Bloomsbury House.

**Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. (a) Identify the speakers in Stanza 1 and Stanza 2 of the poem.

(b) Comment on the relationship between the two speakers as shown in the poem.

(c) How does the poet’s choice of form and language help to present the relationship between the two speakers?

1. Why does the mother make “I” practise calligraphy?
2. Do you think “I” enjoys practising calligraphy? Support your view with lines from the poem.
3. What comparison is made to show that “I” does not have a gift for calligraphy? Is the comparison effective?