

# GCSE Unseen Poetry **Poems** **Booklet**



**BEYOND**  
ENGLISH

A collection of poems for use  
as GCSE Unseen Poetry practice

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### **Polar Bear**

Amid the vast, eternal ice,  
The crystal plain, the drifting floe,  
Dark chasm, awful precipice,  
Buried for ages deep in snow,  
The polar white bear, grim and gaunt,  
Chooseth his solitary haunt.

Isaac McLellan

**floe:** a sheet of ice

### **The Owl**

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;  
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof  
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest  
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,  
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.  
All of the night was quite barred out except  
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,  
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,  
But one telling me plain what I escaped  
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,  
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice  
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,  
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

Edward Thomas

## Humming-Bird

I can imagine, in some other world  
Primeval-dumb, far back  
In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and hummed,  
Humming-birds raced down the avenues.

Before anything had a soul,  
While life was a heave of Matter, half inanimate,  
This little bit chipped off in brilliance  
And went whizzing through the slow, vast, succulent stems.

I believe there were no flowers, then,  
In the world where the humming-bird flashed ahead of creation.  
I believe he pierced the slow vegetable veins with his long beak.

Probably he was big  
As mosses, and little lizards, they say were once big.  
Probably he was a jabbing, terrifying monster.  
We look at him through the wrong end of the long telescope of Time,  
Luckily for us.

D. H. Lawrence

**copse:** small group of trees

**myriad:** great number

**dell:** small valley or hollow

## The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

**azure:** a bright blue

## The Way Through the Woods

They shut the road through the woods  
Seventy years ago.  
Weather and rain have undone it again,  
And now you would never know  
There was once a road through the woods  
Before they planted the trees.

It is underneath the coppice and heath,  
And the thin anemones.  
Only the keeper sees  
That, where the ring-dove broods,  
And the badgers roll at ease,  
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods  
Of a summer evening late,  
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools  
Where the otter whistles his mate,  
(They fear not men in the woods,  
Because they see so few.)  
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,  
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,  
Steadily cantering through  
The misty solitudes,  
As though they perfectly knew  
The old lost road through the woods...  
But there is no road through the woods.

Rudyard Kipling

**coppice:** an area of trees and bushes  
**anemone:** a plant with brightly-coloured flowers  
**cantering:** moderate running (of a horse)

## Something Told the Wild Geese

Something told the wild geese  
It was time to go.  
Though the fields lay golden  
Something whispered,—‘Snow’.  
Leaves were green and stirring,  
Berries, luster-glossed,  
But beneath warm feathers  
Something cautioned,—‘Frost’.  
All the sagging orchards  
Steamed with amber spice,  
But each wild breast stiffened  
At remembered ice.  
Something told the wild geese  
It was time to fly,—  
Summer sun was on their wings,  
Winter in their cry.

Rachel Field

## After Rain

The rain of a night and a day and a night  
Stops at the light  
Of this pale choked day. The peering sun  
Sees what has been done.  
The road under the trees has a border new  
Of purple hue  
Inside the border of bright thin grass:  
For all that has  
Been left by November of leaves is torn  
From hazel and thorn  
And the greater trees. Throughout the copse  
No dead leaf drops  
On grey grass, green moss, burnt-orange fern,  
At the wind's return:  
The leaflets out of the ash-tree shed  
Are thinly spread  
In the road, like little black fish, inlaid,  
As if they played.  
What hangs from the myriad branches down there  
So hard and bare  
Is twelve yellow apples lovely to see  
On one crab-tree.  
And on each twig of every tree in the dell  
Uncountable  
Crystals both dark and bright of the rain  
That begins again.

Edward Thomas

**copse:** small group of trees

**myriad:** great number

**dell:** small valley or hollow

## Travel

The railroad track is miles away,  
And the day is loud with voices speaking,  
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day  
But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,  
Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,  
But I see its cinders red on the sky,  
And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,  
And better friends I'll not be knowing,  
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,  
No matter where it's going.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

## Subway Wind

Far down, down through the city's great gaunt gut  
The gray train rushing bears the weary wind;  
In the packed cars the fans the crowd's breath cut,  
Leaving the sick and heavy air behind.  
And pale-cheeked children seek the upper door  
To give their summer jackets to the breeze;  
Their laugh is swallowed in the deafening roar  
Of captive wind that moans for fields and seas;  
Seas cooling warm where native schooners drift  
Through sleepy waters, while gulls wheel and sweep,  
Waiting for windy waves the keels to lift  
Lightly among the islands of the deep;  
Islands of lofty palm trees blooming white  
That led their perfume to the tropic sea,  
Where fields lie idle in the dew-drenched night,  
And the Trades float above them fresh and free.

Claude McKay

**schooner:** a type of sailing boat

**keel:** the ridge along the base of a boat

## Pike

In the brown water,  
Thick and silver-sheened in the sunshine,  
Liquid and cool in the shade of the reeds,  
A pike dozed.  
Lost among the shadows of stems  
He lay unnoticed.  
Suddenly he flicked his tail,  
And a green-and-copper brightness  
Ran under the water.  
  
Out from under the reeds  
Came the olive-green light,  
And orange flashed up  
Through the sun-thickened water.  
So the fish passed across the pool,  
Green and copper,  
A darkness and a gleam,  
And the blurred reflections of the willows on the opposite bank  
Received it.

Amy Lowell