

## **“Out, Out – “by Robert Frost**

### **OL Sample Answer – From ‘This Is Poetry 2018’**

#### **Question 1**

(a) Which words or phrases in the first 12 lines (ending at “...when saved from work”) help to give you a clear picture of the place where the poem is set? Explain your choice. (10)

(b) Describe the boy’s reaction when he realized that his hand had been badly damaged by the saw. (10)

(c) Do you think the poet shows sympathy for the boy? Explain your answer.

#### **Question2**

**Answer ONE of the following: [each part carries 20 marks]**

(i) write a diary entry of the boy’s sister, in which she records her experiences and feelings on the day the accident happened.

**OR**

(ii) People have said that this is a very dramatic poem. Do you agree? Explain your answer.

**OR**

(iii) Which of the following statements best describes your response to the poem?

- I found the poem cruel because...
- I found the poem dramatic because...
- I found the poem sad because...

Give reasons for your answer.

1. **(a)** The first twelve lines of the poem give us a clear picture of the poem's setting in a New England farmyard. The opening lines give us the immediate environment of the poem: "The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard/ And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood." It is clear that we are in a yard where a buzz-saw is being used to chop firewood for the stove. The third line – "Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it" – adds to the atmosphere of the scene, allowing us to smell the wood and feel the fresh breeze. The poet also describes the view from the yard: "Five mountain ranges one behind the other/ Under the sunset far into Vermont". This gives us the geographical location of the poem – the state of Vermont, surrounded by mountain ranges such as the Appalachians. The poet indicates that it is a beautiful setting, enhanced by the "sunset" and the dramatic mountains. The beauty of the scene contrasts sharply with the violence that is about to occur.

**(b)** The boy's immediate reaction is one of shock. He laughs in disbelief at what has happened: "The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh". He is also, perhaps, trying to be brave and minimise the situation. His next reaction is to turn towards his fellow workers to show them his injury, holding up his hand in an attempt to staunch the blood. His gesture is one of protest: "he swung toward the, holding up the hand, / Half in appeal, but half as if to keep/ The life from spilling". The boy quickly realises the gravity of the situation, as he has grown up on a farm and knows the dangers: "Then the boy saw all -/ Since he was old enough to know, big boy/ Doing a man's work ... He saw all spoiled."

**(c)** I think that the poet shows sympathy for the boy while also criticising the way of life that led to the boy doing such dangerous work. The poet says that he wishes the boy had been allowed to stop work early: "Call it a day, I wish they might have said/ To please the boy in giving him the half hour/ That a boy counts so much when saved from work." Living on a farm, the boy must work hard rather than play, which might be more appropriate for his age. The poet emphasises that the boy is still just a child, even though he is doing dangerous farm work: "He was old enough to know, big boy/ Doing a man's work, though a child at heart".

At the end of the poem, Frost evokes sympathy for the boy highlighting the callousness of the others on the farm. When the boy dies, the others react in a purely practical way: "No more to build on there". They are unable to show their emotions: "And they, since they/ Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs." We can only feel sorry for the boy that no one shows sadness at his passing.

## 2. (ii)

I agree that this is an extremely dramatic poem, full of action and violence. The poem begins with a dramatic description of the buzz-saw. The poet portrays the saw as being like a wild animal: "The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard." He repeats these sound effects throughout the poem: "And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled". At the moment where the boy is injured, the saw is described as having deliberately attacked the boy: "the saw ... Leaped out at the boy's hand". This description of the saw as a living, malevolent thing adds hugely to the drama of the poem.

The poet also builds strong dramatic tension in his description of the boy's death. Every stage is described, from the initial injury to the moment of death. Throughout, the poet emphasises the tension with short, blunt sentences such as "But the hand!" and "So."

We are given a vivid image of the boy's bloody hand: "holding up the hand... as if to keep/ The life from spilling." The boy, who is aware of the seriousness of the situation, heartbreakingly begs his sister to save the hand if possible: "Don't let him cut my hand off -/ The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!" Sadly, however, nothing can be done: "But the hand was gone already".

When the doctor arrives, the poem almost takes on the urgent tone of an emergency room drama. The doctor sedates the boy and performs CPR: "The doctor put him in the dark of ether./ He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath." Suddenly the boy's pulse and heartbeat ebb away: "the watcher at his pulse took fright. / No one believed. They listened at his heart." The poem concludes dramatically with the death of the boy: "Little - less - nothing! - and that ended it."