

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 the 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.

The Visitor by Ian Serraillier

Questions

- 1 List 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 has 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 lines. 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 What 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 answering any questions. After this, encourage them to ask themselves 'what is the poem 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're 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 William, William's wife, the skeleton **1 mark for all three correct** (Content Domain 2b)
- 2 valley **1 mark** (Content Domain 2a)
- 3 Pupils should use their own words to tell the narrative of the poem. Look for key points such as the grave being exposed through the action of the waves, William taking the ring, William avoiding his wife's questioning, the appearance of the skeleton, William's wife asking him three times what the skeleton said, the skeleton's threats, William telling his wife to throw the ring out of the window, William's wife throwing the ring away and the departure of the skeleton.
Up to 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 rest of the poem is structured with 10 sets of rhyming couplets. **1 mark** (Content Domain 2g)

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:
 - two lines of the opening stanza rhyme (bone, alone; although some pupils may refer to 'moon' as a half-rhyme) 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)