

Poetry from A New Century of South Africa edited by Michael Chapman

### [Article on poetry that may be helpful](#)

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Jul 2017 @ 10:59

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I have found this interesting article that was published by the *New York Times* on 10 July 2017.

It is called, "Understanding Poetry is More Straightforwards Than You Think". This is a great starting point if you are afraid to approach poetry.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/10/books/review/understanding-poetry-is-more-straightforward-than-you-think.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/10/books/review/understanding-poetry-is-more-straightforward-than-you-think.html?_r=0)

Have a look at the article and discuss it here.

### [How to read - and understand - poetry](#)

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Jul 2017 @ 10:54

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### [How to read poetry – Part 1](#)

Many people struggle with poetry. It is scary for many reasons. Sometimes it doesn't seem to make sense no matter how many times you read it. It looks different on a page compared to words in a book – it is set out differently.

Poetry is not straight forward. You won't find all your answers the first time you read a poem. A lot of the meaning is hidden. You have to learn to dig it out.

I promise, poetry isn't as difficult as it seems. You just have to get used to it and there are many factors to consider.

1. Poetry is a composition written in verse. That's why the lines are shorter and sentences carry over to the next line. It is like a song. If someone had to write out the lyrics to Whitney Houston's *I will always love you*, it would look like a poem. Here it is:

If I should stay,

I'll only be in your way.

So I'll go, but I know

I'll think of you every step of the way.

And I will always love you,  
I will always love you.  
You, my darling you.

Bittersweet memories,  
That is all I'm taking with me.  
So, goodbye,  
Please, don't cry,  
We both know I'm not what you, you need.

And I will always love you,  
I will always love you.

Read the song and think of the meanings. Think of the context. It's full of emotion; someone is leaving a relationship because she feels she is not good enough for or holding the one she loves back. Even though she loves him, she has to go because she says, "We both know I'm not what you, you need." Saying "you" twice in that line heightens the intensity. You can feel that she is choked up, crying, finding it hard to get words out. And even though she is leaving, she will always think of him and always love him.

You understand it, right? See, poetry is already getting easier.

## 2. Poetry paints pictures by means of poetic devices like language, rhythm and rhyme.

**The language sets the tone and meaning of the poem**, whether it is happy or sad, silly or serious.

**The rhythm is the flow, the pace of the poem**. If the pace or rhythm is slow, then the poem is sad, sombre, serious. Think of how Whitney sings *I will always love you*. She sings slowly, takes her time. It is slow and serious.

If it is fast paced, with a quick rhythm, it could reflect a happy mood. Look at the poem below for an example of this.

The poem below rhymes. That refers to the sound it makes when you read it out loud. This helps with rhythm.

Think of a children's poem like this silly one from *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll:

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,  
“And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly stand on your head –  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

“In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,  
“I feared it might injure the brain;  
But, now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,  
Why, I do it again and again.”

It’s a funny and happy poem. Remember, *Alice in Wonderland* is about a girl who wanders into a world where nothing makes sense and everything is weird so the poem fits the context. You can imagine a young boy scolding his father who is old with white hair and instead of his father sitting in an armchair; he is standing on his head! This is funny imagery. That is the picture that the poem conjures up in your head and what you imagine while reading it.

“Do you think it is right,” the boy says. Isn’t that usually what the parent says? The boy is afraid his father will fall over and get injured.

His father, named William, says that he used to think that by standing on his head he would hurt his brain, but now he has realised that he doesn’t have a brain so he stands on his head over and over again. Obviously, his father does have a brain. We all do. But this is not meant to be taken literally. He is just a silly person and enjoys standing on his head. It’s not hurting him or anyone around him. He enjoys it.

The poem rhymes and has a nice, fast flow or rhythm. In fact, you can add music and make a song of it, which is what a few people have done. Listen to these two song versions of the poem. They are so different in style but they lyrics are the same:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hidgRF3mCE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OlelcfSD-E>

See, poetry isn't hard!

### 3. Poets reflect on events and ideas of their times through their poetry.

You need to have an understanding of where the poet comes from: the city or country and the time. You need to know what was going on around them when they wrote their poems. That's why each poem is so different. You have to try to figure out what the poet was thinking by looking at the world around him at that specific moment. The poet's background is important.

For instance, "City Johannesburg" is about Johannesburg during the apartheid era and Mongane Wally Serote's experiences there. That's why there is a sense of suffering and oppression in the poem. It is a reflection of his reality at the time.

Why not try to write a poem about what you are experiencing as practice?

#### What do colonial and postcolonial mean?

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Jul 2017 @ 10:53

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Use your **study guide** to help and let us discuss what **colonial** and **postcolonial** mean and how these terms relate to your prescribed texts.

These two concepts will have to dictate how you view your poems and books for this course. It is essential that you understand what they mean.

When answering essay questions, always remember to address these two concepts in your writing.

#### Imagery in poetry

by [R BEHARI](#) - 17 Jul 2017 @ 17:33

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**Imagery** is vital in poetry and it is important to understand exactly what it is.

*Imagery*, often involving the **senses**, conjures up **word pictures**. These affect us emotionally and intellectually.

Poetry may use **metaphors**, **similes** or **personification** for comparisons. If the same metaphor is woven throughout the poem, it is called an **extended metaphor**.

The creative use of **sound devices** such as **alliteration**, **assonance** and **onomatopoeia** enhances the *imagery* of a poem.

**Watch these videos to give you a better idea:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoNI1Ue5ZtQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLfdjl8n0e4>

### **Literary Devices**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 17 Jul 2017 @ 17:34

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An easy way to excel at poetry is to know how to identify literary devices.

Watch these YouTube Videos for help on this. I will also look for websites that may help and I will post them here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_pxifB6Co](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_pxifB6Co)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53l6QtWRF3U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0jepXp8qdc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fKCOB8qGQE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qn4P3tvKNAg>

### **The Johannesburg poems**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 17 Jul 2017 @ 17:33

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This week we will look at the following poems:

- *Johannesburg* by William Plomer. **Page 85.**
- *City Johannesburg* by Mongane Wally Serote. **Page 199**

I would like you to think about and comment on how each of these poems work as an example of postcolonial narratives.

**I thought it would be beneficial to look at “Johannesburg” by William Plomer (page 85 and 86) and “City Johannesburg” by Mongane Wally Serote (page 199 – 200) at the same time to compare and contrast these poems.**

Both poems are representations of South Africa’s urban development and the mining industry.

In “Johannesburg” by William Plomer, a white poet who lived from 1903 – 1973, he speaks of retired miners and their lives, “Greybeards who now look back/To the old days” (stanza 4).

The focus is on the male and male degradation within Johannesburg as seen in stanza 3:

Took opportunities to cheat,  
Or meet the most expensive whore,

And conjure up with cards and dice,  
New orgies from new veins of ore.

As a tutorial exercise, read the poem and look at the last two stanzas. Explain the tone used by the speaker. Use page 10 of your study guide for help.

In “City Johannesburg” by Mongane Wally Serote, we also get a glimpse of urban decay, but from a black man’s perspective. The speaker addresses Jo’burg City, and these words are repeated many times in the poem. This is to show how omnipresent the city is in the life of the speaker.

Johannesburg is personified in the poem. Not only is the speaker talking to the city and calls it “you”, but he also gives Johannesburg lifelike qualities such as breathing: “Through your thick iron breath that you inhale/At six in the morning and exhale from five noon” (lines 16 and 17).

The speaker is a black man who lives outside Johannesburg. He travels by bus to work in the Joburg daily. We learn this in lines 13 – 15:

When I run out, or roar in a bus to you,  
I leave behind me, my love,  
My comic houses and people, my dongas and my ever whirling dust.

It is also apartheid era because the speaker mentions his pass. A pass was needed during apartheid to show that a black person had permission to work in the city.

The city is demanding and harsh.

The poem also has examples of literary devices.

Can you find one example of a personification, one example of a simile and one example of a metaphor?

Have a look at these links for further information on the poem:

<http://rustumkozain.bookslive.co.za/blog/2010/02/17/big-words-city-johannesburg-by-mongane-serote/>

<https://mrwbotha.wordpress.com/2007/10/16/on-sarotes-city-johannesburg/>

What are the common themes of the poems?

**Re: The Johannesburg poems**

by K WHATMORE - 3 Aug 2017 @ 7:02

In city Johannesburg Personification--> " through your thick iron breathe you inhale ". Here Johannesburg is given the human quality of having breath . I believe the author is trying to show the vast power of the city and possibly make reference to pollution and industry  
Simile-->" My hand like a starved snake " suggests that he is nervous about getting his pass that he grips onto it as a starved snake would it's prey Metaphor -->"on your cement trees" this expression is metaphor as he is referring the cities skyscrapers and buildings . He is using natural phenomena to describe a place that is lacking such natural elements . I enjoyed reading the articles you posted and I have tried to find similar ones on William plomers poem however I have been unsuccessful . If anyone has some interesting articles pertaining to that poem. I would love to read them Kate

### **Re: The Johannesburg poems**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 9 Aug 2017 @ 6:45

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Great job Kate! I will also have a look for more articles. Take a look at this line please from your writing above:

- My hand like a starved snake " suggests that he is nervous about getting his pass that he grips onto it as a starved snake would it's prey.

"It's" is a contraction - a shortened version - of it is. Like "can't" is cannot and "they're" is they are. You need its without an apostrophe as this is the possessive and shows belonging.

Here is an example of using the contraction - "It's really hot today."

Here is an example of the possessive - "The dog had its puppies."

### **Poetry: "The Zulu Girl"**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 7 Aug 2017 @ 6:18

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**The poem can be found on page 83 of your textbook.**

*The Zulu Girl* is a poem we can all identify with in some way.

It is about the plight of a young Zulu girl who does hard work during the day under the hot sun. She carries her baby on her back as she works which adds to her burden.

#### **Tutorial Question:**

Find examples of lines within the poem that describe how hot it is and how hard the work is.

What can we discern about the workers from how they are described in the poem?

Why do you think this poem is considered a "postcolonial" writing?

### **Analysis**

From line 3 of the poem, the speaker focuses on the girl: she "flings down her hoe". The word "fling" suggests a defiant, rebellious action. She is no longer working like the rest of her "gang", as they are described in line 3. Rather than work, she goes to feed her baby whom she has been carrying on her back. The child is "tormented by flies". This is an image that is ever associated with Africa. How many times have you seen photos of African children on TV surrounded by flies. It is a symbol of poverty. The girl takes the baby to the shade to feed him. As the poem goes on, we get a closer look at the mother and her body, and at last, she looms above us as if we, the audience, are the baby. It is as if we see her through the child's eyes. She is a protective figure. She is imposing. Look at these lines: Her body looms above him like a hill Within whose shade a village lies at rest, Or the first cloud so terrible and still That bears the coming harvest in its breast. Tutorial Question: How does the speaker make you feel about the girl at the start of the poem, and how do you feel about her at the end? Do you think she becomes a symbol of strength?

### **Questions**

There is significance in the word "girl". She is not a woman and also not a wife. It can be interpreted that the Zulu girl is a young, single mom, still a child herself. This could suggest that she has lost her tradition and has been caught up in moral degradation of the modern times. See "A Red Blanket Addresses Christians" for more on this theme. Central to the poem is the relationship between mother and child, highlighted by the intimate act of breastfeeding. There is a 'sense of familiarity' between the speaker and the girl. I would say that the speaker, first of all, sympathizes with the girl and makes us sympathize too. He also pulls her out of the crowd. At the start of the poem, she is one of the gang of workers. The word "gang" makes them seem like prisoners. They each don't have a personal identity but are rather seen collectively. Therefore it is significant that the speaker signals the girl out. He also gives us an intimate look at the geography of her body, and not in a sexual way, as the male gaze often does. It is rather in a protective and maternal way. We feel for her and see her as the child sees her. Thus the sense of familiarity. Can you think of any other reasons?

### **Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 7 Aug 2017 @ 6:21

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The city of Johannesburg symbolizes different experiences by William Plomer and Wally Serote.

Compare and contrast the poems "Johannesburg" by Plomer and "City Johannesburg" by Serote.

Pay attention to the effect of imagery.

THIS IS A COMPARE AND CONTRAST ESSAY.

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Aug 2017 @ 12:17

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Yes, sure. Is there anything in specific you need help with?

For a compare and contrast essay, you must always start in your introduction by explaining the two things that you are comparing. In this case, these are the two poems. State their names, who wrote them and when they were published. REMEMBER: The introduction is the paragraph in which you tell readers about your topic and give them all the relevant background information they need to understand the rest of your essay. You must imagine that the people looking at your essay haven't read the poems and that all the information they are getting is coming from you. You must tell them about the poems and why you are comparing them. The introduction paragraph in a compare and contrast essay establishes your reason for examining the two topics together.

**Re: The Johannesburg poems**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 6:58

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Hi Tejal,

Do you have a copy of the poem? Let's start by you offering your own interpretation. If you have read the poetry introduction I wrote, you will see that interpretation is very subjective. As long as you back up your argument with points, the poem can mean whatever you think it means. What do you think the poem is about?

**Re: The Johannesburg poems**

by [T PANDAY](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 15:49

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Thank you for getting back to me.

Well in the first 3 stanzas I get the image of the poet witnessing fortunes of others i.e. "In champagne baths men sluiced their skins- grimy with auriferous (gold) dust". In the 4th stanza I get the image of an old man thinking back to the past and finding good things

rather than bad. However, from the line "riding bareback..." I find a change of idea. From there on wards I am totally confused.

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [A KHOMO](#) - 15 Aug 2017 @ 21:56

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Please help. Im also not sure what dates to use as the back of the prescribed book lists Plomer's poem as Notes for Poems (1927) and Selected Poems (1985) and even for Serote. the dates range from 1972 - 1994.

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 7:07

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I will check on this. If you cannot find date published, leave it out. But I will keep looking for dates

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [A KHOMO](#) - 15 Aug 2017 @ 23:51

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Please can you also help with this. I am also seeking clarity on when we discuss the 2 poet's in our essay. Is it acceptable to use their surnames as in Plomer and Serote? Or is there another way to continually distinguish between the two poet's?

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 7:03

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Use their last names if you mentioning the poems and who wrote them. However, when discussing the words of the poem, we always say the speaker or the narrator.

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [A KHOMO](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 0:22

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If I refer to a stanza of a poet to state the general feeling of it, should I also be specific in how I arrived at that conclusion by referencing the line within the stanza?

**Re: Assignment 01: Poetry Due 22 August**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 16 Aug 2017 @ 7:04

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Yes, you must back up any points you make by referring to the poem.

**"A Red Blanket Addresses Christians"**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Sep 2017 @ 5:58

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**The poem can be found on page 91 of "The New Century of South African Poetry".**

**Please also refer to pages 3 - 5 of your study guide.**

The author was a Xhosa poetess who published between 1920 - 1929. This was an amazing feat for a black woman at the time.

She was a campaigner against the lack of morality in the city and how it affects woman, particularly the school-educated youth. There is evidence in the poem to show this.

She creates a type of urban poetry.

This poem, in my opinion is a brilliant example of a postcolonial narrative. As your study guide states on page 2, the colonised people of South Africa continued to practise the language and values imposed on them by the coloniser, such as English, Christianity and Western education – the things the speaker in the poem seems to be against.

The speaker identifies as a red blanket. This refers to traditional Xhosa dress. From this, we can deduce that the speaker respects traditional values and the indigenous religion.

She pits herself and her traditional values against the black, educated youth who she believes have fallen into moral degradation after appropriating white culture.

Read stanza 7 as an example of South Africa as a "contact zone":

**You Christians are suckers for every fad,  
You disregarded skin garments and dressed up like whites,  
Your ears ring for white man's booze,  
But whites won't touch a drop of yours.**

She "others" the Christians, separating herself from them. Look at stanzas 6 – 8. She repeatedly says, "You Christians". You can almost hear the disgust and disdain in her voice. She is judging them. She believes she is different and seeks to distance herself from Christians. She becomes inclusive when referring to her own community, "We red blankets" in the last stanza.

But trying to separate herself from the Christians actually has the opposite results, making the poem ironic.

**Use your study guide and explain why you think the poem is ironic.**

**Also, think about why the speaker dislikes the Christian youth so much.**

Are there other examples in the poem of SA being a contact zone?

**"A Red Blanket Addresses Christians"**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 26 Sep 2017 @ 5:22

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Read the poem "A Red Blanket Addresses Christians" by Nontsizi Mqgqwetho on pages 91-92 of *The New Century of South African Poetry*, and answer the question below.

In the absence of shared cultural and religious beliefs, a sense of community is lost.

In the light of this statement, **write an essay in which you analyse the poem "A Red Blanket Addresses Christians" by Nontsizi Mqgqwetho**, highlighting the feelings and concerns of the speaker. Briefly discuss the attitudes of the speaker towards Western education and comment on the usage of language.

**"The Zulu Girl"**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Sep 2017 @ 5:59

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**The poem can be found on page 83 of your textbook.**

*The Zulu Girl* is a poem we can all identify with in some way.

It is about the plight of a young Zulu girl who does hard work during the day under the hot sun. She carries her baby on her back as she works which adds to her burden.

**Tutorial Question:**

Find examples of lines within the poem that describe how hot it is and how hard the work is.

What can we discern about the workers from how they are described in the poem?

Why do you think this poem is considered a "postcolonial" writing?

**Analysis**

From line 3 of the poem, the speaker focuses on the girl: she "flings down her hoe". The word "fling" suggests a defiant, rebellious action. She is no longer working like the rest of her "gang", as they are described in line 3. Rather than work, she goes to feed her baby whom she has been carrying on her back. The child is "tormented by flies". This is an image that is ever associated with Africa. How many times have you seen photos of African children on TV surrounded by flies. It is a symbol of poverty. The girl takes the baby to the shade to feed him. As the poem goes on, we get a closer look at the mother and her body, and at last, she looms above us as if we, the audience, are the baby. It is as if we see her through the child's eyes. She is a protective figure. She is imposing. Look at

these lines: Her body looms above him like a hill Within whose shade a village lies at rest, Or the first cloud so terrible and still That bears the coming harvest in its breast. Tutorial Question: How does the speaker make you feel about the girl at the start of the poem, and how do you feel about her at the end? Do you think she becomes a symbol of strength?

### Questions

There is significance in the word "girl". She is not a woman and also not a wife. It can be interpreted that the Zulu girl is a young, single mom, still a child herself. This could suggest that she has lost her tradition and has been caught up in moral degradation of the modern times. See "A Red Blanket Addresses Christians" for more on this theme. Central to the poem is the relationship between mother and child, highlighted by the intimate act of breastfeeding. There is a 'sense of familiarity' between the speaker and the girl. I would say that the speaker, first of all, sympathizes with the girl and makes us sympathize too. He also pulls her out of the crowd. At the start of the poem, she is one of the gang of workers. The word "gang" makes them seem like prisoners. They each don't have a personal identity but are rather seen collectively. Therefore it is significant that the speaker signals the girl out. He also gives us an intimate look at the geography of her body, and not in a sexual way, as the male gaze often does. It is rather in a protective and maternal way. We feel for her and see her as the child sees her. Thus the sense of familiarity. Can you think of any other reasons?

### Practice exam question

by [R BEHARI](#) - 11 Sep 2017 @ 5:57

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Write an essay in which you discuss how the poet, Roy Campbell, depicts motherhood in the poem "The Zulu Girl".

### Lo Lull by Wopko Jensma

### Meaning

by [R BEHARI](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 7:28

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What does everyone make of this poem? It is filled with experimental writing. The poem has a very surreal, hallucinogenic nature.

How do you feel about the speaker? What is his state of mind? Can you find examples of repetition in the poem?

### PDF discussion

by [R BEHARI](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 7:28

*Wopka Jensma: A Monograph. The Interface Between Poetry and Schizophrenia* by Ayub Sheik (2002) has some interesting insights into the poem.

I hope you have all read this document which was sent with the announcement.

Discuss any thoughts regarding the PDF here.

### **Who was Wopko Jensma?**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 7:29

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It is important to first look at who the poet is. Try to search the internet for information on him and post your findings here.

I've found a Facebook page that is run by his grandson. It states what we already know. His family is searching for him after he went missing in 1993. I think a lot can be said for his state of mind just by reading the very surreal *Lo Lull*.

<https://www.facebook.com/Wopko-Jensma-49133785578/>

<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-04-19-what-happened-to-wopko-jensma>

### **"Pregnancy"**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 26 Sep 2017 @ 5:24

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Read the poem "Pregnancy" by Sally-Ann Murray on pages 436-437 of *The New Century of South African Poetry*, and answer the questions below.

In "Pregnancy", the speaker addresses her unborn child, explaining to it how she feels about her pregnancy and awaiting its birth, as well as what she hopes for its future.

In an essay of about 1500 words (four to five pages), provide a close reading of the poem in which you illustrate the various processes the mother goes through in preparing for the birth of her unborn child. In your answer, refer to how the speaker herself prepares for the child's birth mentally and physically, and use specific examples from the poem to support your argument.

It is important to focus on both the content and the form in your discussion. It is not enough to merely provide a summary of events. Explain clearly how the poet portrays the message by means of both the thematic concerns and the poetic devices employed in the poem.

