**C.X.C.**

**ENGLISH B**

Poems Prescribed for the

2015 – 2017 Examinations

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*A Contemplatoion About Flowers*

By: Henry King

BRAVE flowers--that I could gallant it like you,  
And be as little vain!  
You come abroad, and make a harmless show,  
And to your beds of earth again.  
You are not proud: you know your birth:  
For your embroider'd garments are from earth.  
  
You do obey your months and times, but I  
Would have it ever Spring:  
My fate would know no Winter, never die,  
Nor think of such a thing.  
O that I could my bed of earth but view  
And smile, and look as cheerfully as you!  
  
O teach me to see Death and not to fear,  
But rather to take truce!  
How often have I seen you at a bier,  
And there look fresh and spruce!  
You fragrant flowers! then teach me, that my breath  
Like yours may sweeten and perfume my death.

*Once Upon a Time*

By: Gabriel Okara

Once upon a time, son,  
they used to laugh with their hearts  
and laugh with their eyes:  
but now they only laugh with their teeth,  
while their ice-block-cold eyes  
search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed  
they used to shake hands with their hearts:  
but that’s gone, son.  
Now they shake hands without hearts  
while their left hands search  
my empty pockets.

‘Feel at home!’ ‘Come again':  
they say, and when I come  
again and feel  
at home, once, twice,  
there will be no thrice-  
for then I find doors shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.  
I have learned to wear many faces  
like dresses – homeface,  
officeface, streetface, hostface,  
cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles  
like a fixed portrait smile.

And I have learned too  
to laugh with only my teeth  
and shake hands without my heart.  
I have also learned to say,’Goodbye’,  
when I mean ‘Good-riddance':  
to say ‘Glad to meet you’,  
without being glad; and to say ‘It’s been  
nice talking to you’, after being bored.

But believe me, son.  
I want to be what I used to be  
when I was like you. I want  
to unlearn all these muting things.  
Most of all, I want to relearn  
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror  
shows only my teeth like a snake’s bare fangs!

So show me, son,  
how to laugh; show me how  
I used to laugh and smile  
once upon a time when I was like you.

*Forgive My Guilt*

By: Robert P. Tristram Coffin

Not always sure what things called sins may be,   
I am sure of one sin I have done.   
It was years ago, and I was a boy,   
I lay in the frostflowers with a gun,   
The air ran blue as the flowers, I held my breath,   
Two birds on golden legs slim as dream things   
Ran like quicksilver on the golden sand,   
My gun went off, they ran with broken wings   
Into the sea, I ran to fetch them in,   
But they swam with their heads high out to sea,   
They cried like two sorrowful high flutes,   
With jagged ivory bones where wings should be.   
  
For days I heard them when I walked that headland   
Crying out to their kind in the blue,   
The other plovers were going over south   
On silver wings leaving these broken two.   
The cries went out one day; but I still hear them   
Over all the sounds of sorrow in war or peace   
I ever have heard, time cannot drown them,   
Those slender flutes of sorrow never cease.   
Two airy things forever denied the air!   
I never knew how their lives at last were spilt,   
But I have hoped for years all that is wild,   
Airy, and beautiful will forgive my guilt.

*West Indies, U.S.A.*

By: Stewart Brown

Cruising at thirty thousand feet above the endless green   
the islands seem like dice tossed on a casino’s baize,   
some come up lucky, others not. Puerto Rico takes the pot,   
the Dallas of the West Indies, silver linings on the clouds   
as we descend are hall-marked, San Juan glitters   
like a maverick’s gold ring.  
  
All across the Caribbean   
we’d collected terminals – airports are like calling cards,   
cultural fingermarks; the hand-written signs at Port-  
au-Prince, Piarco’s sleazy tourist art, the lethargic   
contempt of the baggage boys at ‘Vere Bird’ in St. Johns...   
And now for plush San Juan.  
  
But the pilot’s bland,   
you’re safe in my hands drawl crackles as we land,   
“US regulations demand all passengers not disembarking   
at San Juan stay on the plane, I repeat, stay on the plane.”   
Subtle Uncle Sam, afraid too many desperate blacks   
might re-enslave this Island of the free,   
might jump the barbed

electric fence around ‘America’s  
back yard’ and claim that vaunted sanctuary... ‘Give me your poor...’   
Through toughened, tinted glass the contrasts tantalise;  
US patrol cars glide across the shimmering tarmac,   
containered baggage trucks unload with fierce efficiency.   
So soon we’re climbing,  
  
low above the pulsing city streets;  
galvanised shanties overseen by condominiums   
polished Cadillacs shimmying past Rastas with pushcarts   
and as we climb, San Juan’s fool’s glitter calls to mind   
the shattered innards of a TV set that’s fallen   
off the back of a lorry, all painted valves and circuits   
the roads like twisted wires,  
  
the bright cars, micro-chips   
It’s sharp and jagged and dangerous, and belonged to someone else.

*Sonnet Composed Upon Westminister Bridge*

By: William Wordsworth

Earth has not anything to show more fair:

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by

A sight so touching in its majesty:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie

Open unto the fields, and to the sky;

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep

In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet will:

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

*Orchids*

By:Hazel Simmons-McDonald

I leave this house   
box pieces of the five-week life I've gathered.   
  
I’ll send them on   
to fill spaces in my future life.   
  
One thing is left   
a spray of orchids someone gave   
from a bouquet one who  
makes a ritual of flower-giving sent.   
  
The orchids have no fragrance   
but purple petals draw you   
to look at the purple heart.   
  
I watered them once   
when the blossoms were full blown   
like polished poems.   
I was sure they’d wilt   
and I would toss them out with the five-week litter.   
  
They were stubborn.   
I starved them.   
They would not die.   
  
This morning the bud at the stalk’s tip unfurled.   
  
I think I’ll pluck the full-blown blooms   
press them between pages of memory.   
  
Perhaps in their thin dried transparency   
  
I’ll discover their peculiar poetry

*The Woman Speaks to the Man who has Employed Her Son*

By: Lorna Goodison

Her son was first made known to her

as a sense of unease , a need to cry

for little reasons and a metallic tide

rising in her mouth each morning.

Such signs made her know

that she was not alone in her body.

She carried him full term

tight up under her heart.

She carried him like the poor

carry hope, hope you get a break

or a visa, hope one child go through

and remember you. He had no father.

The man she made him with had more

like him, he was fair-minded

he treated all his children

with equal and unbiased indifference.

She raised him twice, once as mother

then as father, set no ceiling

on what he could be doctor,

earth healer, pilot take wings.

But he tells her he is working

for you, that you value him so much

you give him one whole submachine gun

for him alone.

He says you are like a father to him

she is wondering what kind of father

would give a son hot and exploding

death, when he asks him for bread.

She went downtown and bought three

and one-thirds yards of black cloth

and a deep crowned and veiled hat

for the day he draw his bloody salary.

She has no power over you and this

at the level of earth, what she has

are prayers and a mother’s tears

and at knee city she uses them.

She says psalms for him

she reads psalms for you

she weeps for his soul

her eyewater covers you.

She is throwing a partner

with Judas Iscariot’s mother

the thief on the left-hand side

of the cross, his mother

is the banker, her draw though

is first and last for she still

throwing two hands as mother and father.

She is prepared, she is done. Absalom.

*It is the Constant Image of your Face*

By: Dennis Brutus

It is the constant image of your face  
framed in my hands as you knelt before my chair  
the grave attention of your eyes  
surveying me amid my world of knives  
that stays with me, perennially accuses  
and convicts me of heart’s-treachery;  
and neither you nor I can plead excuses  
for you , you know, can claim no loyalty –  
my land takes precedence of all my loves.

Yet I beg mitigation, pleading guilty  
for you, my dear, accomplice of my heart  
made, without words, such blackmail with your beauty  
and proffered me such dear protectiveness  
that I confess without remorse or shame,  
my still-fresh treason to my country  
and I hope that she, my other, dearest love  
will pardon freely, not attaching blame  
being your mistress (or your match) in tenderness

*A Lesson for this Sunday*

By: Derek Walcott

The growing idleness of summer grass  
With its frail kites of furious butterflies  
Requests the lemonade of simple praise  
In scansion gentler than my hammock swings  
And rituals no more upsetting than a  
Black maid shaking linen as she sings  
The plain notes of some Protestant hosanna—  
Since I lie idling from the thought in things—

Or so they should, until I hear the cries  
Of two small children hunting yellow wings,  
Who break my Sabbath with the thought of sin.  
Brother and sister, with a common pin,  
Frowning like serious lepidopterists.  
The little surgeon pierces the thin eyes.  
Crouched on plump haunches, as a mantis prays  
She shrieks to eviscerate its abdomen.  
The lesson is the same. The maid removes  
Both prodigies from their interest in science.  
The girl, in lemon frock, begins to scream  
As the maimed, teetering thing attempts its flight.  
She is herself a thing of summery light,  
Frail as a flower in this blue August air,  
Not marked for some late grief that cannot speak.

The mind swings inward on itself in fear  
Swayed towards nausea from each normal sign.  
Heredity of cruelty everywhere,  
And everywhere the frocks of summer torn,  
The long look back to see where choice is born,  
As summer grass sways to the scythe’s design.

*A Stone’s Throw*

By: Elma Mitchell

We shouted out  
'We've got her! Here she is!  
It's her all right '.  
We caught her.  
There she was -  
  
A decent-looking woman, you'd have said,  
(They often are)  
Beautiful, but dead scared,  
Tousled - we roughed her up  
A little, nothing much  
  
And not the first time  
By any means  
She'd felt men's hands  
Greedy over her body -   
But ours were virtuous,  
Of course.  
  
And if our fingers bruised  
Her shuddering skin,  
These were love-bites, compared  
To the hail of kisses of stone,  
The last assault  
And battery, frigid rape,  
To come  
Of right.  
  
For justice must be done  
Specially when  
It tastes so good.

And then - this guru,  
Preacher, God-merchant, God-knows-what -  
Spoilt the whole thing,  
Speaking to her  
(Should never speak to them)  
Squatting on the ground - her level,  
Writing in the dust  
Something we couldn't read.  
And saw in her  
Something we couldn't see  
At least until  
He turned his eyes on us,  
Her eyes on us,  
Our eyes upon ourselves.  
  
We walked away  
Still holding stones   
That we may throw  
Another day  
Given the urge.

*Test Match Sabina Park* By: Stewart Brown

Proudly wearing the rosette of my skin

I strut into Sabina

England boycotting excitement bravely,

something badly amiss.

Cricket. Not the game they play at Lords,

the crowd – whoever saw a crowd

at a cricket match? – are caged

vociferous partisans, quick to take offence.

England sixty eight for none at lunch.

‘What sort o battin dat man?

dem kaan play cricket again,

praps dem should-a-borrow Lawrence Rowe!’

And on it goes, the wicket slow

as the batting and the crowd restless.

“Eh white bwoy, how you brudders dem

does sen we sleep so? Me a pay monies

fe watch dis foolishness? Cho!’

So I try to explain in my Hampshire drawl

about conditions in Kent

about sticky wickets and muggy days

and the monsoon season in Manchester

but fail to convince even myself.

The crowd’s loud ‘busing drives me out

skulking behind a tarnished rosette

somewhat frayed but now unable, quite,

to conceal a blushing nationality.

*Theme for English B*

By: Langston Hughes

The instructor said,  
  
Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you--  
Then, it will be true.  
  
I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:  
  
It's not easy to know what is true for you or me   
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what   
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me--we two--you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?  
  
Being me, it will not be white.   
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.   
You are white--   
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.   
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.   
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!   
As I learn from you,   
I guess you learn from me--   
although you're older--and white--   
and somewhat more free.  
  
This is my page for English B.

*Dreaming Black Boy*

By: James Berry

**I wish** my teacher’s eyes wouldn’t  
go past me today. **Wish** he’d know  
it’s okay to hug me when I kick  
a goal. **Wish I** myself wouldn’t hold back when answer comes.  
I’m no woodchopper now  
like all ancestors.

**I wish** life wouldn’t spend me out  
opposing. **Wish** same way creation  
would have me stand it would have  
me stretch, and hold high, my voice  
Paul Robeson’s, my inside eye  
a sun.Nobody wants to say  
hello to nasty answers.

**I wish** torch throwers of night  
would burn lights for decent times.  
Wish plotters in pyjamas would pray  
for themselves. Wish people wouldn’t  
talk as if I dropped from Mars.

**I wish** only boys were scared  
behind bravados, for i could suffer.  
I could suffer a big big lot.

**I wish** nobody would want to earn

the terrible burden I can suffer.

*Death Came to see me in Hot Pink Pants*

By: Heather Royes

Last night, I dreamt

that Death came to see me

in hot-pink pants

and matching waistcoat too.

He was a beautiful black saga boy.

Forcing open the small door of my wooden cage,

he filled my frame of vision

with a broad white smile,

and as he reached for my throat,

the pink sequins on his shoulders

winked at me.

Last night, I dreamt

that Death came to see me in hot-pink pants.

He was a beautiful black saga boy

and I hit him with a polished staff

of yellow wood,

and he went down.

But as he reached for me once more,

Laughing, laughing that saga boy laugh,

I awoke, holding myself,

unable to breathe.

How beautiful was Death

in hot-pink pants with matching waistcoat too.

*Dulce et Decorum Est*

By: Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,   
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,   
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs   
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.   
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots   
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;   
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.  
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,   
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;   
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,   
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime. . .   
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,   
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.   
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,   
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.   
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace   
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,   
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,   
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;   
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood   
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,   
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,   
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,   
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est   
Pro patria mori.

*This is the dark time, my love*

By: Martin Carter

This is the dark time, my love,

All round the land brown beetles crawl about.

The shining sun is hidden in the sky.

Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.

This is the dark time, my love,

It is the season of oppression, dark metal, and tears.

It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery.

Everywhere the faces of men are strained and anxious.

Who comes walking in the dark night time?

Whose boot of steel tramps down the slender grass?

It is the man of death, my love, the strange invader

Watching you sleep and aiming at your dreams.

*Ol’Higue*

By: Mark McWatt

You think I like this stupidness! -  
gallivanting all night without skin,  
burning myself out like cane-fire   
to frighten the foolish?  
And for what? A few drops of baby blood?  
You think I wouldn't rather  
take my blood seasoned in fat  
black-pudding, like everyone else?  
And don't even talk 'bout the pain of salt  
and having to bend these old bones down  
to count a thousand grains of rice!  
  
If only babies didn't smell so nice!  
And if I could only stop   
hearing the soft, soft call  
of that pure blood running in new veins,  
singing the sweet song of life  
tempting an old, dry-up woman who been  
holding her final note for years and years,  
afraid of the dying hum ...  
  
Then again, if I didn't fly and come  
to that fresh pulse in the middle of the night, how would you, mother,  
name your ancient dread?  
And who to blame  
for the murder inside your head ...?  
Believe me -  
As long as it have women giving birth  
a poor ol' higue like me can never dead.

*‘Le Loupgarou’*

By: Derek Walcott

A curious tale threaded through the town   
Through greying women sewing under eaves,   
Was how his greed had brought old Le Brun down,   
  
Greeted by slowly shutting jalousies   
When he approached them in white-linen suit,   
Pink glasses, cork hat, and tap-tapping cane,   
  
A dying man licensed to sell sick fruit,   
Ruined by fiends with whom he'd made a bargain.   
It seems one nigh, these christian witches said,   
He changed himself to an Alsatian hound,   
A slavering Lycanthrope hot on a scent,   
  
But his own watchman dealt the thing a wound   
Which howled and lugged its entrails, trailing wet   
With blood to its doorstep, almost dead.

*South*

By: Kamau Brathwaite

But today I recapture the islands'  
bright beaches:  blue mist from the ocean  
rolling into the fishermen's houses.  
By these shores I was born:  sound of the sea  
came in at my window, life heaved and breathed in me then  
with the strength of that turbulent soil.

Since then I have travelled:  moved far from the beaches:  
sojourned in stoniest cities, walking the lands of the north  
in sharp slanting sleet and the hail,  
crossed countless saltless savannas and come  
to this house in the forest where the shadows oppress me  
and the only water is rain and the tepid taste of the river.

We who are born of the ocean can never seek solace  
in rivers:  their flowing runs on like our longing,  
reproves us our lack of endeavour and purpose,  
proves that our striving will founder on that.  
We resent them this wisdom, this freedom:  passing us  
toiling, waiting and watching their cunning declension down        to the sea.

But today I would join you, travelling river,  
borne down the years of your patientest flowing,  
past pains that would wreck us, sorrows arrest us,  
hatred that washes us up on the flats;  
and moving on through the plains that receive us,  
processioned in tumult, come to the sea.

Bright waves splash up from the rocks to refresh us,  
blue sea-shells shift in their wake  
and there is the thatch of the fishermen's houses, the path  
made of pebbles, and look!  
Small urchins combing the beaches  
look up from their traps to salute us:

they rememer us just as we left them.  
The fisherman, hawking the surf on this side  
of the reef, stands up in his boat  
and halloos us:  a starfish lies in its pool.  
And gulls, white sails slanted seaward,  
fly into the limitless morning before us.

*Because I could not stop for Death*

By: Emily Dickinson

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess – in the Ring –

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –

We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –

The Dews drew quivering and Chill –

For only Gossamer, my Gown –

My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity –