

Section C · Flamingo — Poetry

CBSE Class 12 English Core (301) · Poetry extract = 6 marks · 5 poems · Ultimate Revision Sheet

60-SECOND RECALL — the five poems

My Mother at Sixty-Six	Kamala Das · Ageing and filial anxiety · one long sentence, no full stop
Keeping Quiet	Pablo Neruda · Introspection and peace · "count to twelve"
A Thing of Beauty	John Keats · Beauty is a joy for ever · from <i>Endymion</i>
A Roadside Stand	Robert Frost · Rural poverty and false promises
Aunt Jennifer's Tigers	Adrienne Rich · Patriarchal oppression · art outlives the artist

1. My Mother at Sixty-Six — Kamala Das

THE ESSENTIALS *Situation:* the poet drives from her parents' home in Cochin to the airport with her mother beside her, dozing.

Central images: the mother's face is "ashen like that of a corpse" — the shock of realising her mother is old and close to death. Outside, "young trees sprinting" and "merry children spilling out of their homes" — deliberate contrasts of youth and vitality against age and decay.

At the airport, after the security check, the mother stands "wan, pale as a late winter's moon".

The ending: the poet hides her pain behind a smile — "smile and smile and smile..."

Themes: the pain of ageing · a daughter's fear of separation and loss · concealing emotion · the generation gap.

POETIC DEVICES — the 6-marker asks for these by name

Device	Where it appears
Simile	"her face ashen like that of a corpse " · "pale as a late winter's moon"
Personification	"young trees sprinting "
Imagery	Visual — the dozing mother, the merry children
Repetition	"smile and smile and smile" — forced cheerfulness masking grief
Contrast / Juxtaposition	Ageing mother inside the car vs youthful world outside
Structure	Written as one single sentence with no full stop — suggesting a continuous, unbroken flow of thought and the endlessness of the fear

2. Keeping Quiet — Pablo Neruda

THE ESSENTIALS *The proposal:* "count to twelve and we will all keep still" — a brief, universal moment of silence and stillness.

Why twelve: twelve hours on a clock, twelve months of the year — it suggests completeness and a measured pause.

What would stop: fishermen would not harm whales; the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands; "wars with gas, wars with fire" would cease; soldiers would put on clean clothes and "walk about with their brothers".

Crucial clarification: “what I want should not be confused with total inactivity” — he wants introspection, not death or idleness. “Life is what it is about.”

The image of the Earth: just as the Earth seems dead in winter and later proves everything alive, this silence would be **regenerative**.

Themes: introspection and self-examination · universal brotherhood and peace · anti-war · harmony with nature · the danger of rushing, single-minded activity.

POETIC DEVICES **Symbolism** — the number twelve; the Earth in winter as renewal.

Anaphora / Repetition — “let’s not...”

Metaphor — “wars with gas, wars with fire” for all human destruction.

Alliteration — “we would all be together in a sudden strangeness”.

Free verse — no fixed rhyme scheme, matching the meditative tone.

THE MISREADING TO AVOID Neruda is **not** asking for inaction or death. He explicitly says so. He is asking for a **pause from destructive, unexamined activity** so that humanity can reflect. If a question asks whether he preaches idleness, the answer is **no**, and you must quote that line.

3. A Thing of Beauty — John Keats

THE ESSENTIALS **Source:** the opening lines of Keats’s long poem *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*.

The famous opening: “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: / Its loveliness increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness...”

What beauty does: it gives us a “bower quiet”, sleep full of sweet dreams, health and quiet breathing. It removes the “pall from our dark spirits”.

What causes suffering: “despondence”, “inhuman dearth of noble natures”, “gloomy days”, “unhealthy and o’er-darkened ways”.

Things of beauty listed: the sun, the moon, old and young trees that give shade to sheep, daffodils, clear rills (streams) that make a cooling covert, the musk-rose blooms in mid-forest, and “the grandeur of the dooms we have imagined for the mighty dead” (the noble stories of great people who have died).

The conclusion: beauty is an “endless fountain of immortal drink, pouring unto us from the heaven’s brink”.

Themes: beauty is **permanent and life-sustaining** · nature as a source of joy · art and beauty as an antidote to suffering.

POETIC DEVICES **Metaphor** — “endless fountain of immortal drink”; “wreathing a flowery band”.

Imagery — sun, moon, trees, daffodils, rills, musk-rose.

Alliteration — “cooling covert”, “band to bind us”.

Inversion and rich **sensory** description throughout.

4. A Roadside Stand — Robert Frost

THE ESSENTIALS **Situation:** a small shed — a roadside stand — put up by poor country people at the edge of the highway, selling wild berries and squash.

What they really want: not pity but “some city money” — a share in the prosperity that passes them by.

The city people’s response: they either drive past without stopping, or complain that the artless signs “spoil the landscape”, or stop only to turn around, ask the price of a gallon of gas, and complain — and drive off.

The false promises: the “greedy good-doers” and “beneficent beasts of prey” who promise to relocate and improve the villagers’ lives, but really exploit them and rob them of their independence — “enforcing benefits”.

The poet’s own feeling: he confesses to a wish to “put these people out of their pain” all at once, then immediately checks himself.

Themes: rural poverty and urban indifference · the hollowness of political promises · exploitation by so-called reformers · the widening rural–urban divide.

POETIC DEVICES **Oxymoron** — “greedy good-doers”, “beneficent beasts of prey” (the two most-asked examples).

Metaphor — “the flower of cities”.

Irony — those who come to “help” are the ones who exploit.

Alliteration, imagery of the shed and the passing traffic.

5. Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers — Adrienne Rich

THE ESSENTIALS **Situation:** Aunt Jennifer embroiders tigers on a panel.

The tigers: “prance across a screen”, are “bright topaz denizens of a world of green”, they “do not fear the men beneath the tree”, and they pace in “sleek chivalric certainty”. They are fearless, confident and free — everything Aunt Jennifer is not.

Aunt Jennifer herself: her “fingers fluttering through her wool” find even the ivory needle hard to pull. “The massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band / Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer’s hand.”

The ending: when she dies, her “terrified hands” will still be “ringed with ordeals she was mastered by” — but the tigers will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

Themes: patriarchal oppression within marriage · the constraints on women · art as an escape and a form of protest · art outlives the artist.

THE CENTRAL IRONY — always write this The wedding band, a symbol of love, is described as a “massive weight” that oppresses. Aunt Jennifer remains trapped even in death — “ringed with ordeals” — yet the tigers she created are free and immortal. Her art achieves the freedom her life never could. That contrast is the poem.

POETIC DEVICES *Symbolism* — tigers = strength and freedom; wedding band = the burden of marriage.

Metaphor — “massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band”.

Alliteration — “fingers fluttering”, “prancing, proud”.

Contrast — fearless tigers vs terrified aunt.

Structure — three neat *quatrains* with an *aabb* rhyme scheme; the orderly form contrasts with the disorder of her life.

6. Poetic Devices — the quick reference

Device	Definition	Example from these poems
Simile	Comparison using like or as	“ashen like that of a corpse”
Metaphor	Direct comparison, without like/as	“endless fountain of immortal drink”
Personification	Giving human qualities to non-human things	“young trees sprinting ”
Alliteration	Same consonant sound repeated at word beginnings	“ f ingers f luttering”
Oxymoron	Two contradictory words together	“ greedy good-doers ”
Imagery	Language appealing to the senses	“merry children spilling out of their homes”
Symbolism	An object standing for a larger idea	Tigers = freedom; wedding band = oppression
Repetition	Deliberate repeating for effect	“smile and smile and smile”
Irony	The opposite of what is expected or meant	“beneficent beasts of prey”
Enjambment	A sentence running past the line break	Throughout <i>A Thing of Beauty</i>
Free verse	No regular rhyme or metre	<i>Keeping Quiet</i> , <i>My Mother at Sixty-Six</i>

7. Theme → Poem Lookup for extract and value questions

If the question is about...	Use
Ageing, fear of losing a parent, hiding pain	My Mother at Sixty-Six
Peace, introspection, anti-war, brotherhood	Keeping Quiet
Nature, permanence of beauty, joy amid suffering	A Thing of Beauty
Rural poverty, urban indifference, false promises	A Roadside Stand
Women’s oppression, marriage as burden, art immortal	Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers
“Count to twelve”	Keeping Quiet
“Greedy good-doers” / oxymoron	A Roadside Stand
“Massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band”	Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers
“Pale as a late winter’s moon”	My Mother at Sixty-Six
“A joy for ever” / “pall from our dark spirits”	A Thing of Beauty

MOST-ASKED QUESTIONS

- [6M]** Poetry extract — identify the poem and poet, explain the lines, name the poetic device, state the theme.
- [2M]** Why does the poet say “smile and smile and smile”?

3. [2M] What does Neruda mean by “count to twelve”?
4. [2M] What are the things of beauty mentioned by Keats?
5. [2M] Who are the “greedy good-doers”?
6. [5M] How do Aunt Jennifer’s tigers contrast with her own life?

THE HABIT THAT SCORES — The poetry extract is **6 marks of 1 each**, and at least one will ask you to **name a poetic device**. Learn the eleven devices in Section 6 with **one example each from these five poems** — that single table answers most of the extract question without needing the poem in front of you.