

## Literature Paper 2 Section B: Anthology Poetry

### Learning compendium

#### 'Tissue' Dharker

##### Key ideas

\*The poet muses on the fragility of human existence, sparked by an examination of tissue paper.

\*Paper is presented as having the power to change things, despite its fragility.

\*The poet emphasises the thinness and fragility of paper but the thinner the paper, the more powerful it seems to be.

\*The poet links paper to key aspects of civilisation such as commerce, architecture and cartography (map making).

\*Advanced ideas: The poem is complex and ambiguous; its meanings are difficult to grasp. Could the poet be making a point about meaning itself as fragile and insubstantial? The poem could also be viewed as focusing upon conflict in terms of destruction and politics. The poem may give a modern view of current conflict and troubles in our world today: destruction, war, politics, money, wealth and terrorism and identity. Some critics believe that the poem's message is how nothing is meant to last and that it would be better to not hold too tightly to things and instead we should be willing to let go and pass things on in their time to be remade. Basically, that the world would be better if it shared more qualities with 'tissue'.

\*Alternatively she may be suggesting that the significance of human life will outlast the records we make of it on paper or in buildings.

\*Imtiaz Dharker is a poet and film maker. She has Pakistani origins and was raised in Glasgow. Many of her poems examine issues such as religion, terrorism and global politics/identity.

\*'Tissue' is a modern poem. It was published in 2006. It is taken from a collection of poems titled 'The Terrorist at My Table'. The whole collection of poems questions how well we know the people around us. 'Tissue' questions how well we understand ourselves and the fragility of humanity.

##### CHECK-POINT!

1. What does the poem suggest about paper when it becomes thinner and more fragile?
2. Name 3 aspects of civilisation which the poet links paper to/with.
3. In the advanced ideas, what idea is put forward about the meaning of the word 'meaning'?
4. In the advanced ideas, what do some critics believe the poem's message is?
5. In the poem 'Tissue' what does the poet question?

##### Form and structure

9 stanzas of 4 lines (quatrains), unrhymed. The form could be seen to represent the irregularity of life and the flimsy nature of the tissue paper the poem refers to.

The last line is 1 single stanza of 1 line- to emphasise the link between paper and human skin. 'turned into your skin'. The poet ends the poem in this way to emphasise the significance of human life. Alternatively by linking humanity to tissue it could be the poet's way of reminding the reader that human life is fragile and temporary.

Repetition: This is used to represent the idea in the 7<sup>th</sup> stanza of layering paper. Although the poem is set into separate stanzas and is generally of similar line lengths, the poet also uses enjambment to create the idea of overlap between lines and between some stanzas.

'An architect could use all this,  
place layer over layer, luminous...'

The 'architect' may be a reference to God who is believed by some to have created living tissue. It could also be a metaphorical reference to human life being built from the ground up using paper. We can track a life on paper and build a picture of a person. Finally the use of alliteration 'layer over layer, luminous' could be a reference to how as humans our lives are interlinked and we are all part of a shared, lasting history.

There is also the suggestion of the whole of the poem as a parable in nature as it suggests spiritual fulfilment in passing on ownership and letting things pass when they have filled their purpose.

'...find a way to trace a grand design  
with living tissue, raise a structure  
never meant to last'

##### CHECK-POINT!

1. Explain, in your own words, the meanings associated with the final line of the poem.

2. What are the 2 meanings behind the noun 'architect'?
3. Why could the poem be viewed as a parable?

### Language

#### Homonym

The title and reference to the word tissue throughout the poem can be viewed as a homonym (words which are spelt and sound the same but have different meanings). One meaning is that it is used to describe the various pieces of paper which control our lives. The second meaning is as the tissue of a human body.

#### Simile

The poet explores the paradox that although paper is fragile, temporary and ultimately not important, we allow it to control our lives.

'Fine slips from grocery shops...

Might fly our lives like paper kites'

In this quotation the poet references money and the economy drawing our attention to the fact that our lives are governed by items which are as delicate and fragile as a paper kite. It is something that could be easily destroyed yet our whole lives operate around it.

#### Semantic field of light

In the poem light is presented as a positive force- it enables people to see and understand. It can also move through and beyond boundaries and it can break through objects.

'Paper that lets light shine through'

'The sun shines through their borderlines'

'let the daylight break through capitals and monoliths'

This emphasises that light is central to life. The verb 'breaks' suggests the power of light over human constructions.

Alternatively the references to light could be viewed as the poet's use of religious imagery: the poem draws links to religion such as the 'lets the light/ shine through...' where the 'light' (being used as an abstract noun) could represent God or truth.

This is also reinforced in stanza two with the reference to the Koran. Finally stanza eight refers to 'a grand design'. The metaphor of 'grand design' suggests the perfect image of God is traced with 'living tissue' in the form of human kind.

#### Language of uncertainty and possibility

Language used to express uncertainty: The poem has a dream-like quality to it and explores ideas outside of reality. It also has the theme of insubstantiality and instability. Therefore the poet uses language which conveys uncertainty or possibility. This is such as modal verbs ('might' / 'could') and the use of the conditional conjunction 'if'. These techniques signal that the poet is writing about imaginary ideas.

#### Adjectives

Adjectives are used to describe the different qualities of paper: 'thin', 'transparent' and 'fine'. All of these words describe the fragility of paper.

#### Standard English and complex meanings

The poet employs standard language to convey complex ideas.

'the height and weight, who

died where and how, on which sepia date,

pages smoothed and stroked and turned

transparent with attention.'

The literal meaning of the quotation makes reference to birth and death certificates: two important pieces of paper. The poet also uses sibilance ('smoothed' 'stroked') combined with syndetic listing (using the conjunction 'and') to literally show what happens to paper over time but also reflects what happens to humans. It represents the fragility of life and how we change across a lifetime. It may also suggest the value of human life.

The poet makes many links between paper and human skin.

'Maps too. The sun shines through

their borderlines, the marks

that rivers make, roads,

rail tracks, mountain folds,'

This is another metaphorical reference to skin – blemishes, veins, scars are all marks that we get during life like rivers, roads and rails mark land. A wider idea could be that the skin contains a story of a life like paper contains records and stories.

Overall, the poet uses tissue paper as an extended metaphor for life. Each of the examples of paper that the poet references are connected to 'real life'.

### **CHECK-POINT!**

1. What are the 2 meanings of the noun 'tissue'?
2. Explain, in your own words, the paradox linked to paper in the poem.
3. How are references to light linked to religion?
4. Which techniques are used to portray that the poet is describing imaginary ideas?
5. How does the poet make links between paper and human skin?
6. What is the extended metaphor in the poem?

### **Feelings and attitudes**

Control- The poem mentions different things that control or govern human life- there are references to money, religion, nature, pride and governments ('capitals').

Freedom- The speaker imagines a world that breaks free of some of these restrictions, where human constructions lack permanency and their importance.

### **Themes**

Fragility and power: The poet suggests that paper, which is a fragile tissue, has the power to alter and control our existence. Tissue paper alters our view of things; paper is used to record powerful, even sacred, knowledge and information. This leads the poet to speculate that buildings are drawn on thin architect paper; landmarks and geographical features become see-through when they are printed on maps; shop receipts have the power to control our lives, though they are worthless.

The power of humans: The final image is of an architect who creates living flesh out of all types of paper that the poem has listed to create something that resembles human skin. An architect creates a grand design, using layers of paper from all the different types listed earlier in the poem to create something that is living and human. The poem is saying if we let light through, like tissue paper does, we see things differently and we can be free to live. The poet urges us to consider that things we might think of as permanent are not, in fact any more permanent than our own human tissue.

### **Compare with...**

'Checking Out Me History' - heritage, conflict with culture

'The Emigree' - heritage, resolving boundaries between culture and nations

'London' - humanity creating its own boundaries and internal conflict.

### **STOP-CHECK!**

Create spider diagrams for each 'feeling and attitude' and theme, explaining how each one is represented in the poem. Use the other sections to help you.

### **Key quotations**

'who  
died where and how, on which sepia date,  
pages smoothed and stroked and turned  
transparent with attention.'

'let the daylight break through capitals and monoliths'

'An architect could use all this,  
place layer over layer, luminous...'

### **STOP-CHECK!**

1. Learn the key quotations.

Challenge: can you learn the other quotations referred to on the compendium?

### **Glossary**

Alter - change

Koran - the holy text of Islam; sometimes seen as Q'uran or Quran

Sepia - a reddish-brown colour; a very traditional type of ink from Cuttlefish

Transparent - see-through

Architect – a person who designs buildings

Luminous – giving off light; bright or shining

Monoliths – a large single upright block of stone, especially one shaped into or serving as a pillar or monument.

**Useful You Tube Videos**

The NTS English teachers recommend you watch one of the following videos in order to develop your knowledge further or gain a different perspective.

Mr Bruff video link = <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVjZpi9lkcI>

OR

Stacey Reay video link = [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6izJObl\\_nuk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6izJObl_nuk)