

Level 3 Speaking Verse and Prose:

Grade 8 – Verse

Titles in Level 3 Speaking Verse and Prose: Grade 8 – Verse

Human Family

The Thing about Symmetry

Letter to a City under Siege

Dulce et Decorum est

The Quangle Wangle's Hat

Woman Skating

Bridge

These are the Hands

Human Family

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.

Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

By Maya Angelou

The Thing about Symmetry

When I appraised the bump on my nose or the freckle on my right
cheek
your eyes would glow behind me, softening the sharp edges of my
mirror

Real beauty is never found in symmetry, you said

My rolling eyes sent ripples through the harsh reflection
but you were never swayed by my tides
You told me: symmetry is for statues
Too perfect to touch

Love is lopsided

It enters in the crooked slope of your lower lip
and settles in the hidden dimple on your back

True beauty is not the equal spacing of the eyes
or the straight alignment of the teeth
It is the flair of your left nostril when you laugh
It is the defects I refuse to upgrade for a model woman.

You hate the irregular spread of your toes
but I have never seen anything so intimate
as the secret flaws you trust me to keep

And when I stare while you sleep
the strands of your fringe drift in the breeze of my breath,
their lengths perfectly unequal

It does not matter that your features are uneven
because so are my hands
and when we touch our bodies are a harmony of imperfections

You turned me away from the mirror
Until the only reflection I saw was in your eyes
Until I saw the beauty in my clumsily scattered freckles
Until I learned to love lopsided

But when you left and slammed the door
you knocked a picture askew
And I have never seen anything so ugly

*By Alessandra Davison
(LAMDA Graduate)*

Letter to a City under Siege

Turning the pages of the book you have lent me of your wounded city,
reading the Braille of its walls, walking beneath ghost branches
and chestnuts, fires that turn the bullet-shattered windows
bronze,
flaring an instant without warming the fallen houses
where you sleep without water or light, a biscuit tin of nothing
between you,
or later in the cafe that is no longer, you choose the one,
hours of an evening discussing burnt literature
from the library where all books meet with despair,
I want to give your notes back to you, so they might be
published in a common language, not yours or mine, but a tongue
understood by kindergarteners and night-watchmen.
I want to lie down in the cemetery where violets grow in your
childhood
before snipers fired on the city using gravestones for cover.
It isn't difficult to sleep among the dead.
Before leaving I want to tell you that your tunnel is still there,
mud-walled and hallowed of earth, through which you brought
into the city medicine and oranges—oranges!—
bright as winter moons by the barrow-load.
I would crawl through your tunnel as you did,
leaving some of your violets and the night of your poems.
I would bring everyone a gift of pears,
then walk further up, up through the County Street,
where one can see the city in fog, roofs woven of blackened
timber, filled with sky,

uprooted bridge railings groaning in wind, where a shard of glass
is suspended

as a guillotine over the spines of books in a shop window,
and where, through snow, a dog finds his way with, in his mouth,
a human bone.

What happens isn't complicated, is it? Nor is the city hell on
earth.

Shells don't rain down from the heavens, but are fired by human
hands.

The children of the city make bullet-proof vests out of cardboard.

There is no shortage of food, water, medicine—
food, water, medicine are withheld.

The clapping sounds aren't horses, but roof tiles shattering.

There are carcasses of trolley cars, and trams—limbless
caryatids.

The library burns on page sixty, as it burns in all the newspapers
of the world.

Quiet are the ruins of the houses of God. All the houses.

And what else, what more? No food no light no water.

Clocks aren't spared. The tunnel! The oranges!

By Carolyn Forché

Dulce et Decorum est

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 gas-shells dropping softly 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.

By Wilfred Owen

The Quangle Wangle's Hat

On the top of the Crumpetty Tree
The Quangle Wangle sat,
But his face you could not see,
On account of his Beaver Hat.
For his Hat was a hundred and two feet wide,
With ribbons and bibbons on every side,
And bells, and buttons, and loops, and lace,
So that nobody ever could see the face
Of the Quangle Wangle Quee.

The Quangle Wangle said
To himself on the Crumpetty Tree,
'Jam; and jelly; and bread
Are the best of food for me!
But the longer I live on this Crumpetty Tree
The plainer than ever it seems to me
That very few people come this way
And that life on the whole is far from gay!'
Said the Quangle Wangle Quee.

But there came to the Crumpetty Tree,
Mr. and Mrs. Canary;
And they said, 'Did ever you see
Any spot so charmingly airy?
May we build a nest on your lovely Hat?
Mr. Quangle Wangle, grant us that!
O please let us come and build a nest

Of whatever material suits you best,
Mr. Quangle Wangle Quee!

And besides, to the Crumpetty Tree
Came the Stork, the Duck, and the Owl;
The Snail and the Bumble-Bee,
The Frog and the Fimble Fowl
(The Fimble Fowl, with a corkscrew leg);
And all of them said, 'We humbly beg
We may build our homes on your lovely Hat, –
Mr. Quangle Wangle, grant us that!
Mr. Quangle Wangle Quee!'

And the Golden Grouse came there,
And the Pobble who has no toes,
And the small Olympian bear,
And the Dong with a luminous nose.
And the Blue Baboon who played the Flute,
And the Orient Calf from the Land of Tute,
And the Attery Squash, and the Bisky Bat, –
All came and built on the lovely Hat
Of the Quangle Wangle Quee.

And the Quangle Wangle said
To himself on the Crumpetty Tree,
'When all these creatures move
What a wonderful noise there'll be!
And at night by the light of the Mulberry moon
They danced to the Flute of the Blue Baboon,

On the broad green leaves of the Crumpetty Tree,
And all were as happy as happy could be,
With the Quangle Wangle Quee.

By Edward Lear

Woman Skating

A lake sunken among
cedar and black spruce hills;
late afternoon.

On the ice a woman skating,
jacket sudden
red against the white,

concentrating on moving
in perfect circles.

(actually she is my mother, she is
over at the outdoor skating rink
near the cemetery. On three sides
of her there are streets of brown
brick houses; cars go by; on the
fourth side is the park building.
The snow banked around the rink
is grey with soot. She never skates
here. She's wearing a sweater and
faded maroon earmuffs, she has
taken off her gloves)

Now near the horizon
the enlarged pink sun swings down.
Soon it will be zero.

With arms wide the skater
turns, leaving her breath like a diver's
trail of bubbles.

Seeing the ice
as what it is, water:

seeing the months
as they are, the years
in sequence, occurring
underfoot, watching
the miniature human
figure balanced on steel
needles (those compasses
floated in saucers) on time
sustained, above
time circling: miracle

Over all I place
a glass bell

By Margaret Atwood

Bridge

Between here and Colombia
is a pontoon
of fishnet tights filled tight
with star fruit and green, salted mango.

From here to Colombia
is a pageant
of carnivals and parties
and 1am celebrations and girls
in homemade wedding dresses
twirling on their great-great-uncle's toes.

Between here and Colombia
is a green wave
of parrots tumbling in cages no bigger
than their beady, red-glass eyes.

From here to Colombia
is a necklace
of gourds frothing
with brown nameless soups and fried
everything and big bottom ants and
sauces from everywhere and roadkill armadillo.

Between here and Colombia
is a zip line
of stretched elastic marriages
to high school boyfriends.

Between here and Colombia
are stepping stones
of thousands of lost relatives weaving
down hot pavements dangerous with carts
ready to pinch your cheeks and say
You are too thin, what have you been doing?

And I will set out to travel
from here to Colombia
I shall step out
onto the stretched-tight washing line
which links our houses
and wobble onto
the telephone wires
which dangle in the mango trees.
I will ignore the calls from great aunts and great grandmas
great cousins and first cousins,
and hold out the corners of my dancing skirt.
I shall point my jelly sandals
towards the Colombian sun
and dance *cumbia, cumbia* –

until I get there.

By Aisha Borja

These are the Hands

These are the hands
That touch us first
Feel your head
Find the pulse
And make your bed.

These are the hands
That tap your back
Test the skin
Hold your arm
Wheel the bin
Change the bulb
Fix the drip
Pour the jug
Replace your hip.

These are the hands
That fill the bath
Mop the floor
Flick the switch
Soothe the sore
Burn the swabs
Give us a jab
Throw out sharps
Design the lab.

And these are the hands
That stop the leaks
Empty the pan
Wipe the pipes
Carry the can
Clamp the veins
Make the cast
Log the dose
And touch us last.

By Michael Rosen