**War Photographer**

**Overview**

In this poem, Duffy describes the experience of someone whose job it is to witness terrible crimes against humanity and bring them back to us many miles away.

The poem is about how he deals with this kind of traumatic experience.

It asks questions about how we react to disaster in other countries.

**'The reader's eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.'**

Think about these questions now and come back to them once you have been through the Learn-its.

**The poem raises, but does not answer, these kinds of questions**. You can appreciate the poem without having strong opinions on these matters, but Duffy encourages us to think for ourselves, although she does lead us to one particular reading.

**In the end, it is up to you as a reader to decide what you think.**

This picture shows the potential power of still photographic images from the Vietnam war. When the American president saw this picture he decided there and then to end the war.



**Would the picture have the same impact now, if not, why not?**

**Revision**

**Duffy often taps into the symbolic associations of ordinary words. In the first stanza the photographer is in the 'darkroom' and the 'only light is red'**. The process of developing a photograph is turned into something ominous.

Dark contains the idea of **evil, moral darkness,** and **red is associated with blood**. Similarly, **'ordered rows'** would sound innocent enough in other contexts, but here it makes us **think of graves, or bodies waiting to be buried.**

Duffy makes it clear that these wars are happening across the world, from Europe (Belfast), to the Middle East (Beirut) to Asia (Phnom Penh).

**What does the line 'All flesh is grass' suggest about how we value other human beings?**

There is an effective **contrast** in the poem between what was happening in the places where the photographer has been and what is happening back home now:

**War Zones** **England** 'Fields... explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat' 'Ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel' 'A half-formed ghost' Sunday supplements 'A hundred agonies' 'The bath and pre-lunch beers' 'The cries of this man's wife' 'Rural England 'How the blood stained the foreign dust'

**This contrast makes us aware of the enormous gulf between our lives and those of the people in the photographs**.

Maybe the contrast also makes us feel a little more appreciative of and thankful for what we have got in this country, and also perhaps makes us feel a little guilty.

Sometimes this gulf can make it difficult for us to relate to these people.

**Duffy makes us relate and react by using vivid, disturbing images, and by guiding us through the feelings of the photographer himself...**



**Imagery**

Duffy creates some **powerful and disturbing images** in this poem. Four in particular stand out:

**'fields which don't explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat.'**

**'how the blood stained into foreign dust.'**

**'a hundred agonies in black-and-white.'**

**'The reader's eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.'**

**In the exam you will get marks for what you say about quotes, for your analysis of them. For example, if you applied the PEA model to the first quote you'd get something like what’s in the table below.**

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| **Point** |
| It can be difficult for us to relate to suffering in faraway countries and so to make us feel angry and guilty about it Duffy has to use some disturbing and powerful images, images we would rather not think about, or really see. She says we live by... |

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| **Evidence** |
| 'Fields which don't explode beneath the feet Of running children in a nightmare heat. |

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| **Analysis** |
| This image is effective because we would normally think of 'running children' in 'fields' as an image of fun. |
| We also associate children with innocence, and the idea of them being hurt brings out our protective instincts. |
| Duffy does not tell us what these children are running from, some kind of 'nightmare heat', leaving it up to us to imagine our worst fears. |
| In effect, this image is what happened before the images we have all seen on our TV's of children badly burnt, without legs or arms. We know while they are 'running' what will happen to them. |

The **analysis** is the most important and therefore longest part of the answer.

**Set out in an exam essay, the PEA model would look like this:**

It can be difficult for us to relate to suffering in far away countries and so to make us feel angry and guilty about it Duffy has to use some disturbing and powerful images, **images we would rather not think about, or really see. She says we live by, 'fields which don't explode beneath the feet Of running children in a nightmare heat.'** **This image is effective because we would normally think of 'running children' in 'fields' as an image of fun.**  **We also associate children with innocence,** and the idea of them being hurt brings out our protective instincts. **Duffy does not tell us what these children are running from, some kind of 'nightmare heat', leaving it up to us to imagine our worst fears.** In effect this image is what happened before the images we have all seen on our TV's of children badly burnt, without legs or arms. **We know while they are 'running' what will happen to them.**

.**The Photographer**

**How does the photographer feel about, the pictures he has taken, how are they used, and how do people react to them at home?**

**Form**

**Form is the structure and layout of the poem on the page.**. It includes the type of **stanzas** the poet uses, and their rhyme scheme. **The regular form of this poem in some ways mirrors the sense of the photographer's attempt to order his strong emotions.** The form is a way of containing, controlling and dealing with the anger and pain the poet feels. **The fact that the form is unchanging, that the stanzas are all of the same length and the rhyme scheme is constant suggests that despite the photographer's efforts nothing will change**. This idea is re-enforced by the fact that the poem starts with the photographer home from an assignment and ends with him off on one again. **The poem is circular, a closed loop where nothing can change.**

**Summary** **In all poetry matters you must respond to the following:**

* + The subject(s) of the poem
  + The attitude of the poet
  + The poetic devices the poet uses

In other words you will be asked about **what** the poet is writing about **what** the poet feels about the subject(s) and **how** the poem is written.

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| **Subject** |
| Duffy's poem is about how we deal with the suffering of others, who might be faraway. It takes the character of a war photographer to represent someone more involved and committed than we are. |

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| **Attitude** |
| Duffy appears to admire the photographer, and be critical of the rest of us. |
| **The poem is powerfully anti-war.** However, elsewhere Duffy does not spell out her feelings, she allows readers to make their own judgements. |
| **The form however suggests she is pessimistic about things changing for the better.** |

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| **Style** |
| **Duffy uses the symbolic association of ordinary language.** So that a simple word like 'dust' can carry lots of possible meaning. |
| She also includes some **powerful imagery** to shock us out of our complacency. |
| The use of a repetitive form suitably supports the ideas in the poem. |

**When, on the aeroplane, the photographer is staring 'impassively' at 'where he earns his living' and says 'they do not care', who is the 'they' and what don't they care about?**