**Section C: Unseen poetry**

Answer both questions in this section.

**Handbag by Ruth Fainlight**

My mother's old leather handbag,

crowded with letters she carried

all through the war. The smell

of my mother's handbag: mints

and liptsick and Coty powder.

The look of those letters, softened

and worn at the edges, opened,

read, and refolded so often.

Letters from my father. Odour

of leather and powder, which ever

since then has meant womanliness,

and love, and anguish, and war.

\* coty powder – a face powder

**Q1** In ‘Handbag’, what do you think the speaker is saying about her mother? How are these ideas presented? [24 marks]

**Warm up questions to help you plan:**

What is the poem about?

Why do you think the speaker is looking through her mother’s bag now?

What emotions does the poet put across? How does she show these in the poem?

What does the phrase ‘crowded with letters’ suggest about the speaker’s mother?

Why do you think the poet uses enjambment to break up the phrase, ‘carried/ all through the war’?

How does the poet convey the way the handbag smells? Why do you think these smells are important to the speaker?

How does the poet use the sense of touch?

Why do you think ‘Letters from my father’ is the only complete phrase written on a single line?

The poet repeats the word ‘and’ three times in the final line – what effect does this have?

What do you notice about the rhythm of the poem? What effect does this have?

**Jumper by Tony Harrison**

When I want some sort of human metronome

to beat calm celebration out of fear

like that when German bombs fell round our home

it’s my mother’s needles, knitting, that I hear,

the click of needles steady though walls shake.

The stitches, plain or purl, were never dropped.

Bombs fell all that night until daybreak

but, not for a moment, did the knitting stop.

Though we shivered in the cellar-shelter’s cold

and the whistling bombs sent shivers through the walls

I know now why she made her scared children hold

the skeins she wound so calmly into balls.

We open presents wrapped before she died.

With that same composure shown in that attack

she’d known the time to lay her wools aside –

the jumper I open’s shop-bought, and is black!

\* metronome – a machine that ticks at a constant pace to help musicians stay in time

\* plain and purl – types of stich in knitting

\* skein – a length of wool that has been loosely twisted or coiled

**Q2** The speakers of ‘Handbag’ and ‘Jumper’ both use an object to convey their feelings about their mothers. What similarities and differences are there in the way these feelings are conveyed? [8 marks]

**Warm up questions to help you plan:**

What is the poem about?

How does the poet suggest that the speaker and his mother were in danger during the bombing?

Why do you think the speaker’s mother made him hold the wool as she was knitting?

What emotions does the poet put across? How does he show these in the poem?

The poet uses the words ‘shivered’ and ‘shivers’ on consecutive lines. What effect does this have?

How are the last four lines different from the first twelve? Why do you think the poet has done this?

How does the poet use the senses in the poem? Do you think this is effective?

Find an example of onomatopoeia in the poem and explain its effect.

What do you notice about the rhythm of the poem? What effect does this have?

Why do you think it’s significant that the jumper is ‘shop bought’ and ‘black’? Why is this description separate from the rest of the stanza?