In Mrs Tilscher’s Class

You could travel up the Blue Nile  
with your finger, tracing the route  
while Mrs Tilscher chanted the scenery.  
Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswân.  
That for an hour, then a skittle of milk 5  
and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.  
A window opened with a long pole.  
The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.

This was better than home. Enthralling books.  
The classroom glowed like a sweet shop. 10  
Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley  
faded, like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake.  
Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found  
she’d left a good gold star by your name.  
The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved. 15  
A xylophone’s nonsense heard from another form.

Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed  
from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs  
hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce,  
followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking 20  
away from the lunch queue. A rough boy  
told you how you were born. You kicked him, but stared  
at your parents, appalled, when you got back home.

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.  
A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot, 25  
fractious under the heavy, sexy sky. You asked her   
how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled,  
then turned away. Reports were handed out.  
You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown,  
as the sky split open into a thunderstorm. 30

1. Look at lines 1-16. Analyse how the poet’s language in the first two stanzas conveys happy memories of primary school. (4)
2. Look at lines 17-23. Analyse how the poet’s language in this stanza shows that time has moved on and the children are changing. (2)
3. Look at lines 24-30. Analyse how the poet’s language in this stanza shows the children’s changing feelings and emotions as they come to the end of their primary school years. (4)
4. By referring to this poem, and at least one other by Carol Ann Duffy, discuss how Duffy explores the theme of memories, change or time passing. (10)

**Marking Scheme**

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | Candidates should analyse how the poet’s language poet’s language in the first two stanzas conveys happy memories of primary school.  2 marks for detailed/insightful comment  plus quotation/reference.  1 mark for more basic comment plus  quotation/reference.  0 marks for quotation/reference alone.  (Marks may be awarded 2, 1+1) | **4** | Possible answers include:   * ‘skittle of milk’ – Suggests a relaxed and informal scene, a break from learning to socialise and grow independent of the classroom. * ‘chalky… dust’ – subtle reference to time passing as a new lesson begins and new information has been learnt. * ‘A window… long pole’ – The children see their teacher as totally capable, there is nothing she can not do, therefore her need for a long pole is strange to them. This shows their youth (which can be related to growing up) and naivety. * ‘Laugh of a bell’ – Happy carefree, environment, with boisterous children (the idea that the children are boisterous relates to the children being young and running wildly) * .‘this was better than home’ – The writer is using a comparative to show that school is her preferred place to be. This is not what you would expect from a child of this age and therefore there as an emphasis on the enjoyment of school. * ‘enthralling books’ - Enthralling carries connotations of being spellbound, captivated, fully absorbed. This is not the natural reaction that someone of this age might have to school and therefore Duffy stresses her own, independent, view of school. * ‘like a sweetshop’ here the poet has used a simile to further stress her enjoyment of school. She compares her classroom to a sweetshop, due to the young nature of the child in question; it is easy to imagine that a sweet shop is a desirable place to be. This then confirms our belief that the poet adores school. * Sugar paper. Coloured shapes.’ – evokes a world of sweetness and colour which appeals to children * “Mrs Tilscher loved you “ – feelings of security, being valued and cared for * ‘she’d left a good gold star by your name.’ Senses are generally considered to be connected to particular times in your life. In the case of the gold stars, younger students are highly influenced by the visual nature of the reward. Highlight of the school day * ‘xylophone’s nonsense’ furthermore the xylophone is traditionally associated within children's music lessons, which are enjoyable. |
| **2** | Candidates should analyse how the poet’s language in this stanza shows that time has moved on and the children are changing.  2 marks for detailed/insightful comment  plus quotation/reference.  1 mark for more basic comment plus  quotation/reference.  0 marks for quotation/reference alone.  (Marks may be awarded 2+2, 2+1+1 or 1+1+1+1) | **2** | Possible answers include:   * Word Choice – ‘commas’ and ‘exclamation marks’ A literal explanation would be that the poet’s use of the punctuation has developed as she has moved up the school. * Word Choice – ‘commas’ and ‘exclamation marks’ The physical changes, getting bigger. * Imagery –‘inky tadpoles’ and related further on to the idea of ‘three frogs’ the pupils are getting bigger, becoming more mature. * ‘Easter Term’ – a time of growth and change in the seasons, reflected in the children’s growth and change. * ‘Croaking’ reference to adolescence, growing up * ‘A rough boy told you how you were born ’ awareness of more adult themes, loss of childhood innocence. |
| **3** | Candidates should analyse how the poet’s use of  language in this stanza shows the children’s changing feelings and emotions as they come to the end of their primary school years.  2 marks for detailed/insightful comment  plus quotation/reference.  1 mark for more basic comment plus  quotation/reference.  0 marks for quotation/reference alone.  (Marks may be awarded 2 or 1+1) | **4** | Possible answers include:   * ‘alarm’ this example of word choice shows a sudden change in the poets tone. Alarm can be considered to be an unprompted emotion, showing that the poet has not always felt this way and that her feelings have changed in a negative manner. * ‘fractious’ a similar example would be the choice of the word fractious, which can be understood to mean, irritable, restless, awkward, or complaining. All of these suggest a definite sense of unhappiness, which is not seen in the earlier stanzas. * Word Choice – ‘thunderstorm’ a thunderstorm is tempestuous (story/emotional) and tumultuous (chaotic/confused) occurrence, during which anything can happen. It perfectly represents the growth for childhood to puberty, and is the final stage in development that this poem deals with. * The child's questions suggests a naturally rite of passage in everyone’s life (when they find out how babies are made) the transition from childhood into adolescence. Instead of reacting impulsively and violently, as she did earlier, the child shows a sense of maturity in her questioning; this growth shows a change in her character. * Feverish * Electricity * Untidy * Hot * impatient. |
| **4** | Candidates should discuss  how Duffy explores the theme of memories, change or time passing.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone.  Candidates can answer in  bullet points in this final question, or write a number of linked statements. | **10** | Up to 2 marks can be achieved for identifying elements of commonality as identified in  the question  A further 2 marks can be achieved for reference to the extract given.  6 additional marks can be awarded for discussion of similar references to at least one other poem by the poet.  In practice this means:  Identification of commonality (2) (e.g.: theme, characterisation, use of imagery, setting,  or any other key element…)  from the extract:  1 x relevant reference to technique/idea/feature (1)  1 x appropriate comment (1)  (maximum of 2 marks only for discussion of extract) from at least one other text/part of the text:  as above (x3) for up to 6 marks  OR  more detailed comment x2 for up to 6 marks  Thus, the final 6 marks can be gained by a combination of 3, 2 and 1 marks depending on  the level of depth/detail/insight.  The aim would be to encourage quality of comment, rather than quantity of references.  Reference could be made to the  following:   * Mrs Midas: memory – the poem is a reflection of an event in their marriage   Change: the breakdown of their relationship  Time passing: her feeling of anger have changed, seen at the end of the poem   * Originally: memory – reflection on a childhood event. Remembering where she came from/what she has lost   Time passing/ Change: in her speech and brother’s behaviour. Sense of identity and acceptance.   * War Photographer: Memory – the photographer is haunted by what he has seen. * Valentine: the changing nature of relationships * The Way My Mother Speaks: conflicting emotions as she looks back (Memory) at what she is leaving and the uncertainty of the future * In Mrs Tilscher’s Class: a time of change as the pupils are growing up   Many other references are possible. |