‘The Way my Mother Speaks’ by Carol Ann Duffy

I say her phrases to myself  
 in my head  
 or under the shallows of my breath,  
 restful shapes moving.  
5 The day and ever. The day and ever.

The train this slow evening  
 goes down England  
 browsing for the right sky,  
 too blue swapped for a cool grey.  
10 For miles I have been saying  
 What like is it. The way I say things when I think.  
 Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.  
 What like is it.

15 Only tonight  
 I am happy and sad  
 like a child  
 who stood at the end of summer  
 and dipped a net  
20 in a green, erotic pond. The day and ever. The day and ever.  
 I am homesick, free, in love  
 with the way my mother speaks.

1. Look at lines 1-4. With close reference to the text, explain how the writer creates a sense of isolation and loneliness in the opening to the poem. 4 marks
2. Look at lines 13-16. Explain how and why the writer uses contrast to convey her experience moving away from home. 4 marks
3. Look at lines 16-20. Explain how Duffy’s use of imagery helps to convey her emotional state at this point in the poem. 2 marks
4. Duffy often explores her own personal experiences in her poetry. With reference to this poem and at least one other poem by Duffy, explain how Duffy uses poetic techniques to convey a personal experience. 10 marks

**Marking Scheme**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | Candidates should analyse how the poet’s language creates a sense of isolation and loneliness in the opening to the poem.  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:  (“to myself/in my head”)   * Indicates she is alone, not talking to anyone else * indicates she is deep in thought, removed from situation   (“under the shallows of my breath”)   * Suggests whispering, furtive speech only for herself to hear * shallow breathing suggests anxiety, panic at being alone   (“Restful shapes moving”)   * Suggests she is mouthing words of mother to provide sense of comfort * finds it unsettling being alone, needs to be soothed |
| **2** | Candidates should analyse how the poet uses contrast to convey her experience moving away from home.  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) | **4** | Possible answers include:  (“Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent”)   * Duffy’s use of contrast shows that she is being bombarded with conflicting emotions as even though the train is physically quiet, her thoughts and mind is loud. * She is being faced with so many thoughts they are overwhelming her   (“I am happy and sad”)   * Duffy’s use of simplistic language such as “happy” and “sad” show her child-like state * she is confused about her feelings toward this change in her life and feels vulnerable in the adult world, the same way someone who is young would feel |
| **3** | Candidates should analyse how the poet’s use of  imagery helps to convey her emotional state at this point in the poem.  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) | **2** | Possible answers include:  (“dipped a net in a green erotic pond”)   * “green” suggests naivety, * “erotic” suggests adult themes; the pond is murky, suggesting the unknown, referring to the world she in entering into * this emphasises how conflicted she is as she wants to explore adulthood and be free but misses her childhood * Duffy’s imagery here shows that she is tentatively and hesitantly coming into the adult world * Duffy is unsure about the transition from childhood to adulthood   (“I am happy and sad like a child”)   * Just as Duffy’s emotions are constantly changing throughout the poem, so too a child can display a wide range of emotions very quickly * This conveys Duffy’s emotional state as it shows us that she is not stable, does not know how to feel about her situation |
| **4** | Candidates should discuss  the way Duffy poetic techniques to convey a personal experience.  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: uncertain feelings for husband: dislikes the greed and selfishness, despises his lack of thought for her, but still misses physical contact * Originally: persona initially longs for “home”, resents having to fit in to new surroundings, but ends up with confused, contradictory feelings about her origins * War Photographer: caught between two worlds—the suffering of war and the complacency of home—and unable to fit in to either * Valentine: the two sides of love: the superficial promising (“moon . . . promises light”; the kiss; the ring) and the harsh, brutal reality * The Way My Mother Speaks: conflicting emotions as she looks back at what she is leaving and the uncertainty of the future * In Mrs Tilscher’s Class: language to show the safety of the classroom   Many other references are possible. |