How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Answer these questions in full sentences:

- Why do we have war memorials?
- Are war memorials important?
- Why do people wear poppies?
- What do poppies represent?

In Silence Please
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Weir’s poem ‘Poppies’ was commissioned by Duffy as part of a collection of ten contemporary war poems which were published in the Guardian in 2009, as part of a response to the escalating conflict in Afghanistan and the Iraq inquiry.

Weir describes being surprised by the ‘overwhelming response’ she had from readers across Europe to ‘Poppies’. Many of the readers who contacted her were mothers of soldiers killed in action in recent conflicts. She commented in an interview that, ‘I wrote the piece from a woman’s perspective, which is quite rare, as most poets who write about war have been men. As the mother of two teenage boys, I tried to put across how I might feel if they were fighting in a war zone.’

Weir has acknowledged that ‘A lot of my poems are narrative driven or scenarios’, and in ‘Poppies’ she tells the ‘story’ of a mother’s experience of pain and loss as her son leaves home to go to war. She has indicated that: ‘I was subliminally thinking of Susan Owen [mother of Wilfred]… and families of soldiers killed in any war when I wrote this poem. This poem attempts on one level to address female experience and is consciously a political act.’
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

The poem is set in the present day but reaches right back to the beginning of the Poppy Day tradition. Armistice Sunday began in November 1919 as a way of marking the end of the First World War in 1918. It was set up so people could remember the hundreds and thousands of ordinary men who had been killed in the First World War. Today, the event is used to remember soldiers of all wars who have died since then.

When Poppies was written in 2009, British soldiers were still dying in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a way of trying to understand the suffering that deaths caused, the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy asked a number of writers to compose poems, including Jane Weir.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?  
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

The title 'Poppies' sets a tone of remembrance - our school community remembers those who have lost their lives every year.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'? 
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

These images have been in the media. The one on the left is a student urinating on a war memorial. The one below is of people burning poppies as a protest against the war in Afghanistan.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?  
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Key Words

- ‘Armistice Sunday’ – the Sunday closest to 11\textsuperscript{th} November, the date when hostilities ended in the First World War
- ‘blockade’ – a temporary border that closes off a place, usually imposed by troops
- ‘bias binding’ – a type of ribbon that is typically used for the edges of school blazers
- ‘blackthorns’ – a European shrub with spikey hard thorns
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?

Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Poppies

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt’s
upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,
slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.
After you’d gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
your playground voice catching on the wind.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?  
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Task:

How to annotate a poem in detail: PowerPoint.

This skill is important for your revision, and you can use it in the unseen poetry section of the exam.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the speaker in this poem?
2. How many stanzas are in this poem?
3. What does the mother recall playing with her son?
4. What does she compare his gelled hair with?
5. What does she remember pinning to his lapel?
6. What colours are used in the poem?
7. Which words and phrases does Jane Weir use that are associated with war and conflict?
8. What does the speaker release from ‘its cage’?
9. What shape does she make when she leans against the war memorial?
10. What does she hope to hear on the wind?

Deeper Thinking Questions

1. What is the relevance of the poem’s title?
2. What has happened to the speaker’s son?
3. How is this poem different to other war poems in this collection?
4. How does the poet use metaphor?
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Task:

Which statement do you agree with? Explain your answer.

A - 'Poppies' is about a mother grieving for her son.
B - 'Poppies' is about a fear of death.
C - 'Poppies' is about the effect of conflict on individuals.
D - 'Poppies' is about the importance of memories.
How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?
Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Compare the ways the poets present people experiencing difficult times in 'Poppies' and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

[30 marks]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Use your notes to complete a SPLIT grid.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>You should have a quotation to support each point.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagery</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
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**How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?**

*Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPLIT</th>
<th>How do you use SPLIT?</th>
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</table>
| Structure | How is punctuation used?  
            | Who is speaking?  
            | Is there a shift or a change? |
| Patterns | How is repetition used?  
              | Is there a semantic field?  
              | Is there a rhyme scheme or a strong rhythm? |
| Language | Are there any emotive words?  
              | What is the significance of the title?  
              | Is there any interesting vocabulary? |
| Imagery | Are there any metaphors or similes?  
            | How is symbolism used?  
            | Are any images created in your mind? |
| Themes | What is the poet trying to say?  
            | What is the poet's view?  
            | How does context affect meaning? |
**How does Weir present her ideas in 'Poppies'?**
*Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.*

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| S | • Caesura - trying to stay in control  
  • Emotions creep through - e.g. ‘paper red’ |
| P | • Semantic field of injury - ‘spasms’, ‘graze’, ‘bandaged’ - fear for her son’s safety |
| L | • ‘without a winter coat or reinforcements’  
  • ‘reinforcements’ - out of context, fear |
| I | • ‘leaned against it like a wishbone’  
  • simile shows her vulnerability |
| T | • ‘steeled the softening’ vs ‘slowly melting’  
  • her emotions take over - people at home |
'Poppies'
Weir

Context:
Written in 2009 as a response to the Gulf War. Weir focuses on the pain and loss felt by the mother of a soldier.

Themes:
Effects of conflict
Fear
Loss
Individual experiences
Memory

'Spaper red' - Weir uses frequent caesura to suggest the speaker is trying to stay in control. However, the emotions creep through. E.g. when the adjective and noun 'paper red' are inverted.

'Spasms', 'bandaged' and 'graze'
There is a semantic field of injury which seeps into the speaker's memories. These words seem out of context, suggesting the speaker is scared for her son's safety.

'without a winter coat or reinforcements'
The mother's exposure to the elements makes her seem vulnerable. 'Reinforcements' in an interesting lexical choice as it links to battle.

'released a song bird from its cage'
This metaphor represents the mother letting her son go. She gives him his freedom.

'Steeled the softening of my face' - metaphor -
The mother tries to remain strong, but she ends up 'slowly melting' as she struggles to control her emotions.