

GCSE English Literature

Edexcel Conflict Poems - Grade 9 Analysis · Edexcel Anthology

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Edexcel Anthology

25 entries

A grade-9 reading of all fifteen Edexcel (Pearson) Conflict poems plus the comparison method examiners reward. Grade 9 is not summary: it argues what each poet is **doing** to the reader, names the **methods** (form, structure, sound, imagery) and treats the poem as a deliberate construct, not a window onto real events. Every poem below gives you a conceptualised thesis, the load-bearing methods, one short anchor quote and the context (AO3) that sharpens the argument. The cluster then shows how to **compare methods, not just content** - the single move that separates the top band from the middle. Keep quotations short and embedded; explore alternative readings; track how meaning shifts across the poem.

The 15 Conflict poems

A Poison Tree William Blake

Argument: internal, repressed conflict is more destructive than open anger; suppressed wrath festers into calculated, fatal hatred. **Methods:** the extended metaphor grows anger into a literal tree, watered with 'fears' and 'tears', so emotion becomes something cultivated. Neat AABB quatrains and a deceptively nursery-rhyme metre make the speaker's glee chilling; the final image of the foe 'outstretched beneath the tree' is morally ambiguous triumph. **Quote:** 'I told it not, my wrath did grow'. **Context (AO3):** from Songs of Experience; Blake, a dissenting visionary, attacks the repression and false piety he saw in organised religion and rigid social codes.

The Destruction of Sennacherib Lord Byron

Argument: human military might, however vast and glittering, is annihilated in an instant by a greater divine power - mortal pride is futile. **Methods:** galloping anapaestic tetrameter drives the Assyrian advance, then the rhythm itself becomes the army's doom. The simile 'like the wolf on the fold' makes the host predatory; the turn to stillness ('cold', 'still', 'silent') enacts sudden death. Colour imagery shifts from 'purple and gold' to grey decay. **Quote:** 'like the wolf on the fold'. **Context (AO3):** Byron versifies an Old Testament account (2 Kings); a Romantic fascinated by the sublime and by tyranny humbled, he frames earthly power as transient against the divine.

Extract from The Prelude William Wordsworth

Argument: nature holds a sublime, almost moral power that overwhelms youthful human arrogance and reshapes the mind long after - a conflict between self and the natural world. **Methods:** blank verse and enjambment first mirror the confident, gliding boat, then the volta - the looming peak personified as it 'strode after me' - turns serenity to terror. First-person retrospective narration shows experience digested into wisdom; the 'huge and mighty forms' that trouble his dreams prove nature's lasting psychological grip. **Quote:** 'a huge peak, black and huge'. **Context (AO3):** Romantic pantheism - Wordsworth treats nature as a living, instructive force, a counter to industrial and rationalist values.

The Man He Killed Thomas Hardy

Argument: war is an absurd accident of circumstance that forces ordinary men to kill people they would otherwise have befriended; the real conflict is between conscience and the orders of the state. **Methods:** a plain, colloquial ballad voice and regular ABAB quatrains stage an ordinary soldier reasoning aloud. Caesura and hesitant dashes ('I shot him dead because - / Because he was my foe') expose how flimsy the justification is. The understatement 'quaint and curious war is' damns it. **Quote:** 'I shot at him as he at me'. **Context (AO3):** Hardy, writing around the Boer War, questions imperial conflict by giving voice to the common soldier rather than the general or the cause.

Cousin Kate Christina Rossetti	Argument: the conflict is gendered and social - a patriarchal double standard ruins a poor woman while rewarding a richer rival, yet the speaker reclaims power through her child. Methods: a bitter dramatic monologue in ballad stanzas builds a fairy-tale rise-and-fall the lord exploits. Plant imagery degrades her ('an unclean thing') against Kate's elevation. The triumphant final stanza inverts the power: the lord lacks the heir she alone can give. Quote: 'He wore me like a silken knot'. Context (AO3): Rossetti, troubled by Victorian sexual hypocrisy and the plight of 'fallen women' (she volunteered with them), exposes how class and gender combine to destroy reputation.
Half-caste John Agard	Argument: the very term 'half-caste' is an act of linguistic violence; the poem mounts a witty, escalating attack on racism and the reductive labelling of mixed identity. Methods: phonetic Creole spelling ('explain yuself') asserts a cultural voice against Standard English authority. The recurring challenge 'Explain yuself' and absurd images (Picasso, English weather mixing light and shadow) turn the slur back on the accuser. A single closing full stop arrives only when the speaker finally demands respect. Quote: 'wha yu mean / when yu say half-caste'. Context (AO3): Agard, Guyanese-British, confronts the casual racism of 1980s Britain and reclaims language as a tool of empowerment.
Exposure Wilfred Owen	Argument: the true enemy of the WWI soldier is not the enemy but nature itself and the deathly, purposeless boredom of waiting - war as slow attrition, not glory. Methods: the weather is the aggressor through personification - 'merciless iced east winds that knife us' - while parhymenion (knife us / nervous) leaves every line unresolved, like the stalled offensive. The despairing refrain 'But nothing happens' ends five stanzas, dramatising paralysis. Quote: 'But nothing happens'. Context (AO3): Owen writes from front-line experience to demolish the 'old Lie' of patriotic glory; his faith falters as religion offers no comfort in the freezing trenches.
The Charge of the Light Brigade Alfred, Lord Tennyson	Argument: celebrates the soldiers' obedient heroism while quietly indicting the leaders whose blunder doomed them - glory and futility held in tension. Methods: insistent dactylic 'Half a league' rhythm gallops like hooves; anaphora and the refrain 'the six hundred' ritualise the sacrifice. The blunt passive 'Some one had blunder'd' buries the guilty commander. Repeated imperatives ('Charge') and personified 'jaws of Death' frame the valley as devouring. Quote: 'Theirs but to do and die'. Context (AO3): Tennyson, Poet Laureate, responds to a real 1854 Crimean War catastrophe reported in the press; he honours the men yet cannot fully suppress the criticism of authority.
Catrin Gillian Clarke	Argument: love and conflict are inseparable; the fierce tension between mother and child begins at birth and never ends, because true closeness breeds a lifelong struggle for separation. Methods: the central conceit of the umbilical 'rope' becomes a tug-of-war ('I wrote / All over the walls'). Free verse and a two-stanza time shift (birth, then adolescence) trace the conflict renewing. Oxymoronic 'tender' violence and the final 'defiant' child hold love and antagonism together. Quote: 'red rope of love'. Context (AO3): Clarke, a Welsh poet, writes from personal maternal experience; the poem universalises the paradox that the people we love most are those we most fiercely fight.
War Photographer Carol Ann Duffy	Argument: exposes the moral discomfort of representing suffering - the photographer agonises while a comfortable Western public consumes and forgets, raising the ethics of who profits from pain. Methods: ordered, regular sestets and 'spools of suffering set out in ordered rows' contrast structure with chaos, mirroring his attempt to control horror. The darkroom develops 'a half-formed ghost'; religious imagery ('priest', 'Mass') sacralises his task. Quote: 'they do not care' - the editor and reader. Context (AO3): Duffy was inspired by photojournalist friends; the poem critiques media commodification of distant conflict and Western apathy.

Belfast Confetti
Ciaran Carson

Argument: sectarian violence shatters not only bodies but language and identity itself; the speaker is left unable to read his own city or finish his own sentence. **Methods:** an extended metaphor turns punctuation into shrapnel ('an asterisk on the map', 'a fount of broken type'), so the explosion fractures syntax. Long, broken lines and unanswerable questions ('Why can't I escape?') enact panic and entrapment; street names become a labyrinth. **Quote:** 'a fount of broken type'. **Context (AO3):** Carson writes from the Northern Irish Troubles ('Belfast confetti' was slang for the bolts and nails packed into riot bombs); the loaded British military street names deepen the sense of occupation.

The Class Game
Mary Casey

Argument: class conflict is fought through language, dress and accent; the speaker defiantly refuses to be shamed for her working-class identity and turns the snobbery back on the reader. **Methods:** a direct, accusatory address ('How can you tell what class I'm from?') confronts the reader as judge. Phonetic dialect spelling ('gleamin' aluminium') and crude, proud contrasts of 'H's' and toilet-vs-loo assert authenticity. Rhetorical questions frame class as a 'game' with rigged rules. **Quote:** 'Or is it because my hands are stained'. **Context (AO3):** Casey, a working-class Liverpoolian poet, writes against the entrenched British class system and the cultural snobbery that polices how people speak.

Poppies
Jane Weir

Argument: shifts the lens from soldier to mother, arguing that conflict's most enduring power is the private grief and loss it inflicts on those left behind. **Methods:** a domestic, tactile semantic field (sewing, 'blockade', 'spasms of paper red') turns ordinary maternal care into the language of war and wounds. Free verse and fractured time mirror a grieving mind; the released 'songbird' image voices yearning for a son who may not return. **Quote:** 'I was brave, as I walked'. **Context (AO3):** deliberately undated so it speaks for mothers across Afghanistan and Iraq to the World Wars; poppies evoke Remembrance and the ritualised, public memory of loss.

No Problem
Benjamin Zephaniah

Argument: the conflict is the lived experience of racial stereotyping; the speaker rejects the labels forced on him while exposing how prejudice burrows under the skin and provokes anger. **Methods:** a defiant first-person voice and the ironic refrain 'I am not de problem' invert the accusation. Phonetic Creole spelling asserts cultural pride; the metaphor of being made a 'human satellite dish' shows identity distorted by others' projections. The shift to 'sometimes I think I have no soul' admits the inner damage. **Quote:** 'I am not de problem'. **Context (AO3):** Zephaniah, a British-Jamaican dub poet and activist, writes against the institutional racism and stereotyping of black Britons.

What Were They Like?
Denise Levertov

Argument: modern war does not merely kill people - it erases an entire culture, leaving only unanswerable questions where a peaceful civilisation once was. **Methods:** a question-and-answer structure mimics a cold museum catalogue, then dissolves into elegy ('It is not remembered'). The contrast between gentle pastoral imagery ('peaceful clouds', 'the flowering') and the bombs that silenced it dramatises annihilation. The detached, scholarly tone implies the culture is already lost to memory. **Quote:** 'Who can say? It is silent now'. **Context (AO3):** Levertov, an American anti-war poet, protests the Vietnam War; the past-tense framing imagines the Vietnamese people studied as if already extinct.

Comparison clusters (and how to compare methods, not just content)

The futility and reality of war
The Man He Killed
Exposure
Charge of the Light Brigade

All confront combat, but from **opposing ideological angles**. **Compare the methods:** Tennyson's galloping **dactylic rhythm** and ritual refrain glorify obedient sacrifice; Hardy undercuts that with a **colloquial ballad voice** and stammering caesura that exposes how arbitrary killing is; Owen removes the enemy entirely, making **weather and boredom** the killer through pararhyme that denies resolution. Argue that the Victorian poem **celebrates** while hinting at blame, whereas Hardy and Owen **condemn** - the shift from external heroic narration to the ordinary soldier's doubting voice tracks how attitudes to war changed.

Power humbled - human and divine The Prelude . The Destruction of Sennacherib . A Poison Tree	Each stages a conflict in which an overreaching power is brought low. Compare the methods: Wordsworth and Byron both use rhythm to enact the turn - the gliding blank verse breaks into terror, the galloping anapaests freeze into 'silent' death - so form itself delivers the humbling. Blake instead works through an extended metaphor , growing private wrath into a fatal tree. Argue that nature humbles arrogance in Wordsworth, God humbles tyranny in Byron, and the self humbles its own enemy in Blake - three scales of power, three sources of the force that overturns it.
Identity, prejudice and reclaiming voice Half-caste . No Problem . The Class Game . Cousin Kate	These poems locate conflict in identity and the labels imposed by others , and fight back through voice. Compare the methods: Agard and Zephaniah both weaponise phonetic Creole and an ironic refrain ('Explain yuself', 'I am not de problem') to turn a slur back on the accuser; Casey uses direct accusatory address and dialect to confront the reader as snob. Rossetti's bitter dramatic monologue reclaims power for a wronged woman through her child. Top-band move: compare whether each speaker wins - the defiant present tense of Agard and Casey against the wounded admission in No Problem.
Conflict's cost to those left behind Poppies . War Photographer . What Were They Like? . Belfast Confetti	All four relocate conflict's power to aftermath, observers and the erasure of life rather than the battlefield. Compare the methods: Weir uses a domestic semantic field turned military to voice a mother's grief; Duffy uses structure to enact intrusion as 'ordered rows' fail to contain chaos; Carson fractures syntax so violence shatters language; Levertov's question-and-answer form mourns a whole vanished culture. Discriminator: Poppies gives the bystander-mother's loss, War Photographer the observer's ethical paralysis, Belfast Confetti the victim's panic, What Were They Like the historian's elegy - four distances from the violence.
Grade 9 comparison method (Edexcel comparative essay)	
What the question and AOs actually reward	Edexcel gives you one named poem printed on the paper and asks you to compare it with one other Conflict poem of your choice. Marks are AO1 (personal, conceptualised response with embedded quotation), AO2 (analysis of language, form and structure and their effects - the biggest discriminator) and AO3 (context used to illuminate meaning, not bolted on). There is no AO4 here. Grade 9 = a sustained, comparative thesis about what both poets do, threaded through every paragraph, with exploratory analysis of how form, structure and language create meaning.
Structure: thematic, integrated paragraphs (not poem-by-poem)	Never write all about poem A then all about poem B - that caps you in the middle bands. Build thematic paragraphs that compare both poems at once . A reliable shape: (1) conceptual topic sentence comparing the poets' ideas; (2) embedded quote from poem A + method + effect; (3) comparative connective + embedded quote from poem B + method + effect; (4) AO3 woven in to deepen, not summarise; (5) a 'so what' sentence returning to your thesis. Aim for three or four such paragraphs.
Compare methods, not content (the top-band move)	Weak answers compare what the poems say ('both are about war'); grade 9 compares how they say it and to what effect. Use precise comparative connectives: 'Whereas Owen denies resolution through parhyme, Tennyson imposes it through a galloping refrain.' Track form, structure, voice, sound and imagery as deliberate choices. Best practice: show a shared method used to opposite ends (both Agard and Zephaniah use Creole - but one to mock, one to mourn) or opposite methods serving the same idea .
Weave context (AO3) - illuminate, do not bolt on	Context scores only when it changes the meaning of a method. Bad: 'This was written during the Troubles.' Grade 9: 'Carson's shattered syntax mirrors a Belfast where British military street names have made the speaker a stranger in his own city.' Anchor each context point to a specific word or structural choice. Useful frames: Romantic pantheism, Victorian empire and the Crimean blunder, the WWI disillusionment, the Northern Irish Troubles, Vietnam-era protest, British class and the racism of post-war immigration.

Conceptualised topic sentences (top-band openers)

Lead every paragraph with an arguable idea, not a feature-spot. Models: 'For both Hardy and Owen, the soldier's real enemy is not the man opposite but the system that put a rifle in his hands.' 'Where Tennyson ritualises sacrifice into glory, Hardy reduces it to a bewildered shrug, so heroism dissolves into a single *quaint*.' 'Both Agard and Zephaniah treat their own language as the territory a prejudiced society cannot occupy.' These signal a thesis and method awareness in one line.

Embedding, alternative readings and a thesis-driven conclusion

Embed quotations inside your sentence ('the *red rope of love* binds mother and child as it strains to snap') and keep them short. Zoom to **single words or sounds** - a verb, a caesura, a half-rhyme - then widen to the whole-poem effect. Offer an **alternative reading** ('Blake's ending may read as triumph, or as moral self-damnation') to show exploratory thinking. Your conclusion should not summarise: it should land your **overarching comparative judgement** about which poet presents conflict more powerfully, and why their **method** makes it so.