

This Moment – Sample Answer from 2001 Papers

A neighbourhood.

At dusk.

Things are getting ready
to happen
out of sight.

Stars and moths.

And rinds slanting around fruit.

But not yet.

One tree is black.

One window is yellow as butter.

A woman leans down to catch a child
who has run into her arms
this moment.

Stars rise.

Moths flutter.

Apples sweeten in the dark.

1. (a) Why in your opinion does the poet call the poem

? (10)

! "

I think the poet calls the poem "This Moment" because she wants to highlight the significance of a particular moment in time. The whole focus of the poem is on this instant when the child runs into its mother's arms. We, along with all nature, hold our breaths and wait for the event which is central to the poem. This moment, when "A woman leans down to catch a child / who has run into her arms" is the point around which the poem pivots, so it is fitting that this should be reflected in the title.

The importance of this embrace – of "This Moment" is shown in the change of pace: up to that point the movement of the lines has been deliberate and slow. The short sentences and the full stops add to the sense of anticipation. The moment itself is one of expressive action and all nature celebrates the precious love between a mother and a child. Everything that has been still and hushed now comes to life. "Stars rise. / Moths flutter. / Apples sweeten in the dark." The poem ends with the phrase "this moment", reinforcing the importance of that brief interval of time. I think that, because the mother and the child are the focus of the poem, "This Moment" is truly a point in time which is of great moment.

1. (b) Write out two images from the poem that best help you to picture the neighbourhood at dusk. Give a reason for your choice in each case.

!
\$
#

"One tree is black.
One window is yellow as butter."

This image helps me to imagine the neighbourhood at dusk. It is easy to imagine the first house lights being turned on as the day draws to a close and families gather in their homes. I see the tree as silhouetted against the brightly-lit window, and the

effect is both homely and striking. The simplicity of the language and the domestic setting do not detract from the powerful visual effect created by this vivid contrast of black and yellow, of light and dark. There is something deliberate about the repetition of the word "One" at the start of both lines. Our attention is focused and the image is somehow clearer as a result. The simile which compares the yellow of the window to butter makes the neighbourhood at twilight seem ordinary but lovely—a homely place to which all of us can relate.

"Stars rise.

Moths flutter.

Apples sweeten in the dark."

I have chosen this second image because it helps me to visualise a beautiful, warm summer's evening in the neighbourhood Boland describes. The repeated "s" sounds in "stars", "rise", "Moths", "Apples" and "sweeten" give the image a softness and a quietness which is in keeping with the close of day. The onomatopoeic "flutter" of the moths evokes memories of a typical twilight scene as the insects are drawn to the lit windows and bump softly and repeatedly against the glass in their efforts to get to the light. The arrangement of the lines and the full stops at the end of each one slows down the pace of the poem again after the embrace, and this emphasises the gentle, slow pace of a summer's evening in the neighbourhood.

Everything in the images I have chosen, from the simple beauty of the language to the measured, slow pace of the lines helps me to picture this neighbourhood at day's end.

1. (c) Taken as a whole, does this poem give you a comforting or threatening feeling about the neighbourhood? Explain your answer. (10)

%

#

#

#

Taken as a whole, this poem gives me a comforting feeling about the neighbourhood. The time may be dusk, but the darkness in the poem adds to the sense of mystery

instead of creating a threatening atmosphere. It is easy to imagine things happening "out of sight" at this shadowy time of the day. However, there is no hint that the events which are "getting ready / to happen / out of sight" are in any way bad or frightening. Rather there is a feeling of hushed anticipation and suppressed excitement.

This comforting feeling is reinforced by the simple language and the positive imagery throughout the poem. The simile in which the lit window is described as being "yellow as butter" is homely and domestic. All of the things Boland describes in this short, lyric poem are familiar to us. There are stars in the sky, fruit in bowls, moths fluttering in the dark. And, of course, there is the central image of the child running into its mother's arms. This alone would make the poem seem comforting, but the feeling is strengthened by the fact that all nature celebrates the love between the mother and child. "Stars rise. / Moths flutter. / Apples sweeten in the dark."

The repeated "s" sounds throughout the poem add to the gentle, quiet mood which makes the neighbourhood seem such a warm, comforting place. Combined with the slow pace of the lines, they create an atmosphere which is peaceful and reflective.

Overall, the impression I get of the neighbourhood from my reading of this poem is of a place where nature and humanity are in harmony and together celebrate the simple but loving moment when a child runs into its mother's waiting arms.