



**ENGLISH HL
GRADE 12**

22 FEBRUARY 2021

**POETRY: ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ON
*AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM***

Presented by Mrs Stevens

1. AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM

David Rubadiri

- 1 From the west
- 2 Clouds come hurrying with the wind
- 3 Turning sharply
- 4 Here and there
- 5 Like a plague of locusts
- 6 Whirling,
- 7 Tossing up things on its tail
- 8 Like a madman chasing nothing.

- 9 Pregnant clouds
- 10 Ride stately on its back,
- 11 Gathering to perch on hills
- 12 Like sinister dark wings;
- 13 The wind whistles by
- 14 And trees bend to let it pass.

- 15 In the village
- 16 Screams of delighted children,
- 17 Toss and turn
- 18 In the din of the whirling wind,
- 19 Women -
- 20 Babies clinging on their backs -
- 21 Dart about
- 22 In and out
- 23 Madly;
- 24 The wind whistles by
- 25 Whilst trees bend to let it pass.
- 26 Clothes wave like tattered flags
- 27 Flying off
- 28 To expose dangling breasts
- 29 As jagged blinding flashes
- 30 Rumble, tremble and crack
- 31 Amidst the smell of fired smoke
- 32 And the pelting march of the storm.

SECTION A:

1. Refer to line 6: *'Like a plague of locusts'*. Account for the clouds being described as a 'plague of locusts'. (2)
 - The description suggests that the **clouds are moving swiftly** and are bent on **bringing destruction**.
 - The suggestion is that the **storm will be violent, destructive** and **unstoppable**.

2. Refer to line 13: *'Like dark sinister wings'*. Suggest a reason for the speaker's use of The word 'sinister'. (2)
 - The word '**sinister**' has implications of **darkness and evil**.
 - There is an element of something **ominous**.
 - This suggests that the **storm will be a malevolent force** that will bring **chaos and destruction**.

3. Refer to lines 22 - 24: *'Dart about / In and out / Madly'*. Comment on how the speaker's use of short lines contributes to the atmosphere of the poem. (3)
 - The SHORT LINES suggest a **frenetic movement (fast, energetic, uncontrollable, wild)** and **constant fearful activity**.
 - This is as a **consequence of the fear** the people experience as they try to prepare for the impending storm.
 - People are engaged in frenzied activity **trying to organize themselves** before the **storm hits**.
 - The **atmosphere** is filled with **tension and fear**.

4. Refer to line 33: *'and the pelting march of the storm.'* Comment on how the diction and imagery in this line serves as an effective conclusion to the poem. (3)
 - The use of the word '**pelting**' has connotations of **continuity, harshness** and **violence**.
 - The word '**march**' brings to mind the **idea of an army or group of people moving together** for a single purpose.
The implication is that the **storm is rapidly approaching**.
 - It is **inevitable and unstoppable**.
 - This is an effective conclusion in that the **poem prepared the reader for a violent, inevitable onslaught (attack) which is now imminent (approaching)**.

[10]

SECTION B:

2.1 Refer to line 9: *'Like a madman chasing nothing.'*
What impression of the wind is conveyed by this description? (2)

- The impression is that the wind is **unpredictable/out of control** and **dangerous**, bringing with it **chaos** and **disruption**.

2.2 Suggest how the word, '*sinister*' (line 13) contributes to the mood of the poem. (2)

- '*Sinister*' has connotations of something that is **evil**, **frightening** and **destructive**.
- The mood is **oppressive**, **ominous** and **foreboding**.

2.3 Refer to lines 20–24: *'Women – /Babies clinging ... In and out/Madly'*
Discuss how these lines convey the attitude of the women towards the storm. (3)

- The women's **panicked state** and **anxiety** reflect their **fearful attitude** toward the storm.
- Their **rushing about** gathering their possessions and their children creates a sense of **urgency**.
- The children's having to cling to their mothers' backs intensifies the **agitation** of the mothers and their determination **to protect** their children.
- They **dread** the havoc that the storm might cause.

2.4 Refer to lines 30–33: *'As jagged blinding .../of the storm.'*
Comment on whether these lines are an appropriate conclusion to the poem. (3)

- The conclusion is **appropriate** because the **title** creates the **expectation** that the poem is about **a thunderstorm**.
- The poem's focus is on the **build-up to the storm**.
- By focusing on the **elements of the wind and the clouds**, the speaker gives them a significance and **power of their own**.
- They are the **harbingers alerting people** to the **approach of the storm**.
- The **lightning flash** and the **rumbling thunder** create **tension** as the reader anticipates the **final eruption of the storm**.
- The thunderstorm is seen as an **extended metaphor** for the **destructive effects of colonialism**.

2.5 What does the word '*plague*' suggest about the impact of the storm? (2)

- It suggests that the storm will cause **extensive damage** (1)
- that will lead to **human suffering** (1).

2.6 Explain the effect of the alliteration in '*Toss and turn*'. (2)

- The repeated **hard 't' sounds** in 'toss' and 'turn' (1)
- suggest how the **wind violently carries** the children's **screams in unpredictable directions, creating chaos** and **fear** (1).

2.7 Refer to lines 14 and 15: *'The Wind whistles by/And trees bend to let it pass.'* Comment on the appropriateness of this image in the context of the poem. (2)

- This image **emphasises** the **power of the wind** (1)
- and the fact that **nothing can stand up to it** (1).

2.8 What effects do the references to 'madman' and 'madly' have? (2)

- They **emphasise** (1)
- that the **storm is irrational** (1)

2.9 This poem could be read as a warning about the impact of colonialism in Africa. Do you agree with this statement? Justify this response by referring to the imagery. (3)
Your own opinion, for example:

- I agree because the poet wrote this poem in the context of the **struggle for the freedom** of Malawi from British rule.
- The image of the storm as a '**plague of locusts**' signifies the **chaos and suffering** that colonialism caused (1).
- We see that the **women were helpless** in the path of the storm, **running 'madly'**, with their **clothes torn** from their bodies and '**flapping like flags**'.
- This image **emphasises** how, **under colonial rule** (1) **people lost their dignity** (1).

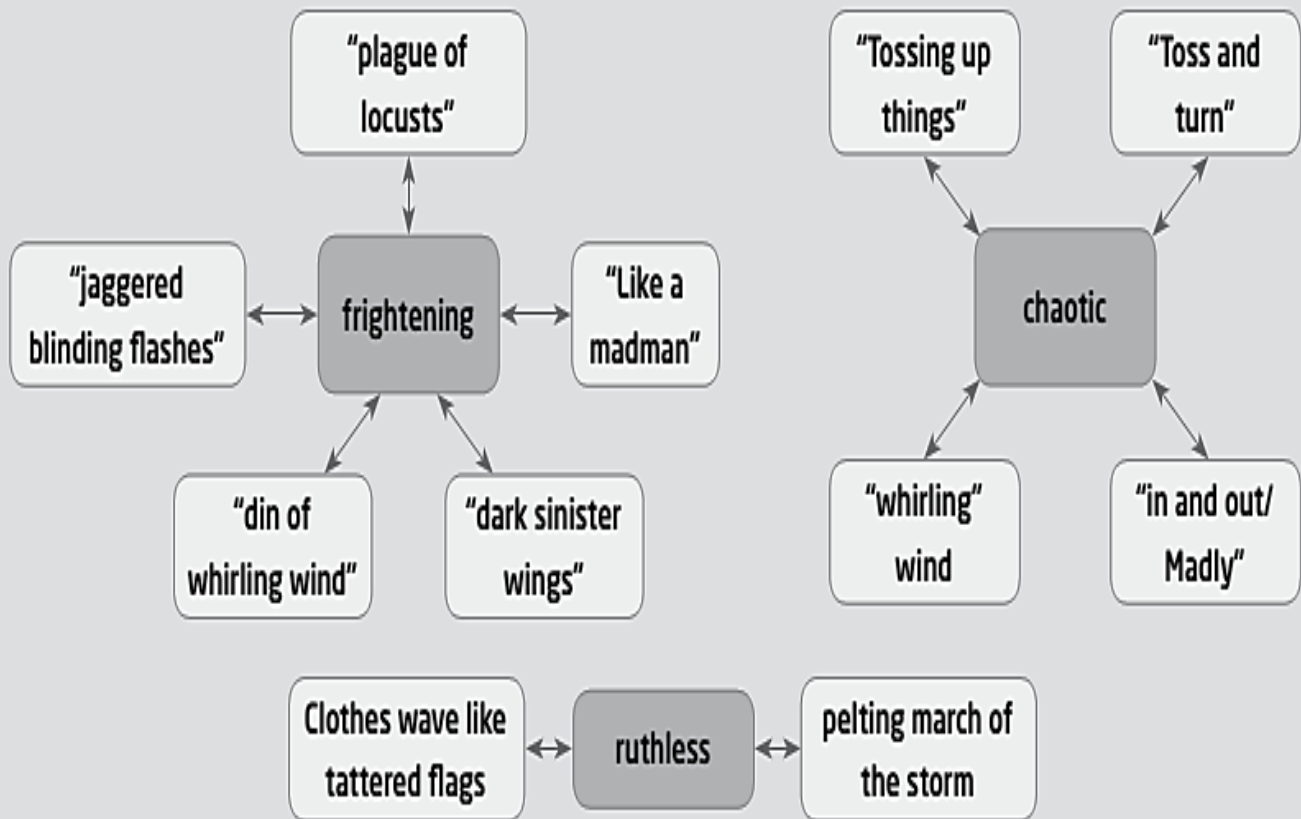
OR

- I disagree because the images very clearly relate to the physical effects of an actual storm: The '**pregnant clouds**' are full of rain (1),
- '**The Wind whistles by**' shows the **power of the wind** in a storm (1) and
- '**the smell of fired smoke**' suggests the **lightning** (1).

SECTION C: EXAMPLE OF AN ESSAY QUESTION

The storm in '**An African Thunderstorm**' is a frightening, chaotic, ruthless force. With reference to the diction, imagery and tone, critically discuss this statement. Your response should take the form of a well-constructed essay of 250–300 words (about ONE page).

Plan your essay: Use three mind maps to prepare a draft, by organising references from the poem around the three key words in the question, like this:



The poet describes the approaching storm as powerful and destructive – ‘*a plague of locusts*’, something that is ‘*tossing*’ things with its tail, and that has ‘*dark sinister wings*’. The wind causes chaos and the effects of the storm on the people are devastating. The poet uses **diction and images** that create a sinister and **ominous tone**.

In Stanza 1, the storm is compared to locusts and a madman. This idea of madness is repeated in Stanza 3, when the women run about ‘*Madly*’. The poet compares the storm to a frightening animal, which has ‘*dark sinister wings*’. The physical effects of the storm are also frightening, such as the noise, which creates a ‘*din*’ and the lightning, which comes in ‘*jagged blinding flashes*.’

The poet also uses **diction (words) and images** that build an atmosphere of chaos. He uses verbs that emphasise the physical chaos, such as ‘*Turning/ Sharply*’, ‘*Whirling*’ and ‘*Tossing*’ in Stanza 1. The humans react chaotically in Stanza 3, when the screams of the children ‘*Toss and turn*’ in the wind and the women ‘*Dart about/In and out/Madly*’.

The power and ruthlessness of the storm is emphasised by the **images** of the helpless women, whose ‘*Clothes wave like tattered flags*’, an image that suggests their vulnerability and the ability of the storm to rob them of their dignity. The image in the last line of the poem, of the ‘*pelting march of the storm*’ underlines its relentlessness and cruelty and seals the **serious and devastating tone** of the poem.

The **tone** is ominous: words like ‘*plague*’ and ‘*madman*’ in Stanza 1, ‘*dark sinister*’ in Stanza 2, and ‘*madly*’, ‘*jagged blinding*’, ‘*Rumble, tremble, and crack*’ in Stanza 3 all contribute to an uneasy, uncomfortable mood. The overall effect of the words, images and tone of this poem is of a powerful force that is able to visit destruction on the people in its path.