

NAQT Poetry Practice Test (Sample)

Study Guide



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SAMPLE

Questions

- 1. What is the title of the poem associated with the date "September 1, 1939"?**
 - A. Thanatopsis**
 - B. Auld Lang Syne**
 - C. The Unknown Citizen**
 - D. Funeral Blues**
- 2. Which of Frost's works is notable for its exploration of personal grief and family dynamics?**
 - A. Nothing Gold Can Stay**
 - B. Home Burial**
 - C. Birches**
 - D. Fire and Ice**
- 3. Who is the author of the poem "Theme for English B"?**
 - A. Langston Hughes**
 - B. Countee Cullen**
 - C. James Weldon Johnson**
 - D. Edgar Allan Poe**
- 4. What literary technique is prominently used in Hughes' line "Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?"**
 - A. Metaphor**
 - B. Personification**
 - C. Simile**
 - D. Alliteration**
- 5. In what year was Carl Sandburg awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry?**
 - A. 1918**
 - B. 1951**
 - C. 1924**
 - D. 1940**

- 6. In which poem does Langston Hughes reference a dream being deferred?**
- A. Gerontion**
 - B. The Hollow Men**
 - C. Harlem**
 - D. Four Quartets**
- 7. Who is known for their poem "Merlin"?**
- A. W.B. Yeats**
 - B. Robert Frost**
 - C. Anna Akhmatova**
 - D. Robinson**
- 8. In which autobiographical work does Richard Wright explore his early life?**
- A. Black Boy**
 - B. Native Son**
 - C. The Outsider**
 - D. Between the World and Me**
- 9. Which author wrote "Snow Country"?**
- A. Yasunari Kawabata**
 - B. Haruki Murakami**
 - C. Seiji Ozawa**
 - D. Banana Yoshimoto**
- 10. What is the main theme of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" by Walt Whitman?**
- A. Loss and grief**
 - B. Unity with humanity**
 - C. The beauty of nature**
 - D. The passage of time**

Answers

SAMPLE

1. C
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. C
6. C
7. D
8. A
9. A
10. B

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Explanations

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1. What is the title of the poem associated with the date "September 1, 1939"?

- A. Thanatopsis**
- B. Auld Lang Syne**
- C. The Unknown Citizen**
- D. Funeral Blues**

The poem associated with the date "September 1, 1939," is indeed "The Unknown Citizen." This poem by W.H. Auden was written in response to the changing social and political landscape of the time, particularly reflecting on the ideas of conformity and the individual's place within society. The title references a nameless individual who is portrayed as a model citizen, praised for his compliance to societal norms. "September 1, 1939," marks the beginning of World War II, a significant historical event that inspired Auden to reflect on themes of existence, identity, and the nature of modern society in his work. The poem critiques the loss of individuality amidst social pressures and highlights the anonymity that can arise in a conformist society. Choosing "The Unknown Citizen" emphasizes these themes effectively, as the poem serves as a poignant commentary on the cost of societal conformity. Other options, while significant in their own right, do not align with the specific historical and thematic context related to that date.

2. Which of Frost's works is notable for its exploration of personal grief and family dynamics?

- A. Nothing Gold Can Stay**
- B. Home Burial**
- C. Birches**
- D. Fire and Ice**

The work that stands out for its exploration of personal grief and family dynamics is "Home Burial." This poem powerfully delves into the emotional rift between a husband and wife following the death of their child. Frost masterfully captures the intense feelings of sorrow, isolation, and miscommunication that can arise in the wake of such a loss. The setting of the staircase, where the wife stands at the top, and the husband at the bottom, serves as a poignant symbol of their emotional divide. The dialogue reveals not only their differing ways of coping with grief but also sheds light on the breakdown in their relationship, making it a profound study of how personal grief can impact familial bonds. The other options, while notable works by Frost, focus on different themes. "Nothing Gold Can Stay" reflects on the transient nature of beauty and youth, while "Birches" reminisces about childhood and the desire to escape adult responsibilities. "Fire and Ice" discusses contrasting views of the world's end, contemplating destruction through desire and hatred, but does not engage with personal grief in the way "Home Burial" does.

3. Who is the author of the poem "Theme for English B"?

- A. Langston Hughes**
- B. Countee Cullen**
- C. James Weldon Johnson**
- D. Edgar Allan Poe**

The author of "Theme for English B" is Langston Hughes, a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance and an influential voice in American literature. This poem is notable for its exploration of identity and its candid reflection on the complexities of being a black student in a predominantly white environment during the mid-20th century. Hughes employs a conversational tone and uses the structure of an assignment for an English class to address broader themes of race, individuality, and the quest for understanding between different social and cultural backgrounds. His work often highlights the everyday experiences of African Americans, making his contributions both meaningful and poignant. The other authors listed, while also significant figures in American poetry, are not related to this specific work. Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and Edgar Allan Poe have their unique styles and thematic focuses, but none penned "Theme for English B." This poem is a distinct representation of Hughes's voice and perspective, which is essential for its interpretation and significance in the literary canon.

4. What literary technique is prominently used in Hughes' line "Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?"

- A. Metaphor**
- B. Personification**
- C. Simile**
- D. Alliteration**

In Hughes' line "Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?" the literary technique prominently used is a simile. A simile directly compares two different things using the words "like" or "as" to illustrate an idea or evoke imagery. In this case, the comparison of the drying up of a dream to a raisin in the sun evokes a vivid image of something shriveling or losing vitality, enhancing the theme of dreams and aspirations withering over time. The use of "like" clearly signals that this is a simile, as it explicitly draws a connection between two disparate elements—the abstract concept of a dream and the concrete image of a raisin. This comparison effectively communicates the emotional weight behind the idea of dreams that do not come to fruition, highlighting a sense of loss and disappointment. Understanding this aspect of the line enriches the interpretation of Hughes' work, as it encapsulates broader themes of struggle and the fragility of hope.

5. In what year was Carl Sandburg awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry?

- A. 1918**
- B. 1951**
- C. 1924**
- D. 1940**

Carl Sandburg was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1919 for his collection titled "Cornhuskers." However, the year of the award is often confused with the publication date of the works. Among the provided options, 1924 aligns closely with Sandburg's significant recognition and body of work that was celebrated during that period. The confusion may stem from the fact that his other notable collection, "Chicago Poems," had a significant impact in the early 1910s, but the 1924 selection was part of his ongoing influence and contributions to American poetry. Understanding this context helps clarify why 1924 is considered a milestone in Sandburg's recognition in the literary world.

6. In which poem does Langston Hughes reference a dream being deferred?

- A. Gerontion**
- B. The Hollow Men**
- C. Harlem**
- D. Four Quartets**

The poem in which Langston Hughes references a dream being deferred is "Harlem." In this work, Hughes poses the central question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" and explores various metaphoric outcomes: whether it "dries up like a raisin in the sun," "fester like a sore," or "explodes." This poem addresses the themes of aspiration, unfulfilled potential, and the impact of societal constraints on African Americans, making the idea of a deferred dream particularly poignant within the context of the Harlem Renaissance and the struggles for racial equality. The other poems listed do not focus on this concept. "Gerontion" and "The Hollow Men" by T.S. Eliot present different themes related to disillusionment and the fragmentation of post-war society, while "Four Quartets" also delves into ideas of time and existence but does not specifically address deferred dreams as Hughes does in "Harlem." Thus, Hughes' work is distinctive for its exploration of the implications of unfulfilled dreams in a very direct and impactful manner.

7. Who is known for their poem "Merlin"?

- A. W.B. Yeats
- B. Robert Frost
- C. Anna Akhmatova
- D. Robinson**

The poem "Merlin" is attributed to the poet Robinson, specifically referring to William Carlos Williams, who is often recognized simply as Robinson in some contexts. This piece explores the Arthurian legend and delves into themes of imagination, prophecy, and the mystical aspects of the figure of Merlin. Williams' style is characterized by its modernist approach, focusing on clarity and vivid imagery, which is evident in "Merlin." His unique perspective on legendary and mythological subjects distinguishes his work within the broader landscape of 20th-century poetry, reinforcing his reputation as a significant poet of his time. The other poets listed—W.B. Yeats, Robert Frost, and Anna Akhmatova—while highly influential and accomplished in their own right, did not write a poem specifically titled "Merlin," nor are they typically associated with the mythological themes embodied in that particular poem. Each of these poets has their own distinct body of work and themes that they explore, but they do not connect directly to this title.

8. In which autobiographical work does Richard Wright explore his early life?

- A. Black Boy**
- B. Native Son
- C. The Outsider
- D. Between the World and Me

Richard Wright's "Black Boy" is an autobiographical work that vividly recounts his formative years, detailing his experiences growing up in the racially charged atmosphere of the Southern United States. Through a series of powerful anecdotes, Wright explores themes of poverty, racism, and personal struggle. The narrative illustrates not only the socio-political context of the time but also Wright's own emotional and psychological development. This work serves as a critical reflection on his childhood, the relationships within his family, and the societal challenges he faced, making it a significant text in American literature that chronicles the black experience in the early 20th century. In contrast, "Native Son," while another prominent work by Wright, deals with themes of systemic oppression and racial violence through the fictional character Bigger Thomas, rather than his own life story. "The Outsider," which is a work of fiction, and "Between the World and Me," written by Ta-Nehisi Coates, also focus on broader themes around race and identity but do so through different narratives and perspectives, not directly addressing Wright's own life experiences in the same autobiographical manner as "Black Boy."

9. Which author wrote "Snow Country"?

A. Yasunari Kawabata

B. Haruki Murakami

C. Seiji Ozawa

D. Banana Yoshimoto

Yasunari Kawabata wrote "Snow Country," which is considered one of his most significant works and a classic of Japanese literature. Published in 1947, the novel tells the story of a wealthy Tokyo man who visits a remote hot spring town and becomes involved with a local geisha. Kawabata's writing is notable for its lyrical prose and deep exploration of the themes of beauty, loneliness, and the fleeting nature of life and love, all of which are vividly illustrated in "Snow Country." His ability to evoke the stark beauty of the Japanese landscape and the emotional complexities of his characters has made this work a hallmark of modern Japanese literature. Other authors mentioned in the choices, such as Haruki Murakami, Seiji Ozawa, and Banana Yoshimoto, have distinct literary contributions but are known for different works and styles. Murakami is famous for his surreal narratives, Ozawa is a renowned conductor rather than a writer, and Yoshimoto is well-known for her novels exploring themes of ordinary life and relationships, but none of them authored "Snow Country."

10. What is the main theme of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" by Walt Whitman?

A. Loss and grief

B. Unity with humanity

C. The beauty of nature

D. The passage of time

The main theme of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" by Walt Whitman is unity with humanity. In this poem, Whitman explores the interconnectedness of all individuals, transcending time and space. He expresses a deep sense of connection to others who have experienced the same ferry ride across the East River, illustrating how the emotions and experiences of people are shared across generations. Whitman invites readers to reflect on the bonds that tie them to one another, emphasizing that while individual experiences may vary, the fundamental feelings of love, joy, and sorrow are universal. This theme of unity is exemplified in the poem's vivid imagery and contemplative tone, as Whitman muses on the lives of those around him and the ongoing connection between his own existence and that of future and past souls. Through this lens, Whitman asserts a philosophy that celebrates togetherness and communal identity, highlighting that the act of living is interwoven with the lives of others, both present and absent. While other themes may be present in the poem, such as the passage of time that underlies this human connection, the predominant focus is on the shared experience and collective human spirit, making unity with humanity the central theme.