

Revision Guide

Blessing

Imitiaz Dharker

Scrbblly.

‘the
small
splash,
echo’

A close-up, low-angle shot of a glass being filled with water. The water is captured in mid-pour, splashing upwards and creating a dynamic, textured background. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the clarity and movement of the water.

Blessing

Imtiaz Dharker

"The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water"

(Full poem unable to be reproduced due to copyright)

VOCABULARY

Pod - Part of a plant that contains seeds, used to signify new life.

Municipal - Owned or controlled by the council or local government of a town.

Congregation - A gathering of people, usually used for religious purposes.

Frantic - conducted in a hurried, excited, and disorganised way.

Blessing - A positive action that occurs as a result of a God or powerful figure's approval or attention.

Frantic - conducted in a hurried, excited, and disorganised way.

Polished - refined, sophisticated, or elegant.

TASK

Write out your own definition of the word 'Blessing'.

- What things do you consider to be blessings in your own life?
- Do you consider yourself to be a particularly blessed person? Why / why not?



STORY/SUMMARY

Stanza 1: We're told that skin cracks from lack of water, this may refer to the skin of the Earth (which cracks in dry times) or human skin.

Stanza 2: The speaker commands us to imagine water dripping, she interprets this sound as the voice of a kind god.

Stanza 3: She explains that sometimes when a pipe bursts, water rushes out and people excitedly gather to collect it.

Stanza 4: Finally, children also gather around the pipe and bathe in the water, which is considered a blessing.

SPEAKER/VOICE

The speaker uses a **third person omniscient narrative voice** to tell the story, so the effect is filmic (we imagine it playing out like a film in front of us). This also provides a distanced perspective, where we can observe the people who gather round the water without feeling too intimately connected to them - this demonstrates that it's a general situation being described, and that this type of reaction to water is common across countries where drought or abject poverty occur.

The speaker is in a joyful and eager mood. Throughout the entire poem, she maintains this tone and attitude. She begins her poem with a **couplet** to convey the extremeness of the shortage of water as it is incomplete. Then, all of a sudden, she announces the burst water in a happy tone that is almost whisper-like, using **analogies** like "the voice of a kindly god." **Adjectives** like "frantic hands" are used to describe eager people who collect the

LANGUAGE

Imperative verb - 'Imagine the drip of it' - the speaker directly commands us to picture a steady drip of water in our minds, in order to create empathy with the characters in her poem - as the poem is written in English, likely her audience will be from an educated first world country and it will at first be difficult for them to understand how it feels to not have enough water, as in more developed countries we take it for granted.

Sibilance - 'small splash' 'sometimes the sudden rush' - the poet uses repeated 's' sounds to imitate the rushing flow of water and to help us to imagine its sound as it drips, trickles, pours and gushes.

Metaphor - 'silver crashes to the ground' - water is described as 'silver', suggesting how it glitters and shines in the sunlight but also the connotations of silver being precious, rare and expensive. This contrasts to many Westerners' attitudes to water - as we may feel that it's a basic and almost unnoticed aspect to our lives.

Asyndetic Listing - 'pots, / brass, copper, aluminium, / plastic buckets, / frantic hands,' - the asyndetic listing here, combined with **enjambment (structure/form point)** over several lines, gives a sense that as the water overflows, life also spills out around it - people emerge from their houses with many different implements to collect and cherish the water, finally even using their 'frantic hands' (a kind of **synecdoche** that suggests the frantic panic of the people themselves).

Imagery - the poem is replete with both **visual** and **auditory imagery**: we can hear the sound of the water via phrases such as 'small splash, echo / in a tin mug' with its **fricative** (s/sh) and **plosive** consonant sounds (p/ch/t/g). We also see images clearly, such as the 'naked children / screaming in the liquid sun', which could imply the suffering the children usually go through in their poverty-stricken lives, as well as their complete joy as they play in the flowing water.

Similes - 'The skin cracks like a pod' - cracking of the skin has been similarised to that of a pod so as to provide a visual image to the addressee. This also enhances the **imagery** surrounding the water crises Dharker tries to show.

Alliteration - 'Flow has Found... Small Splash... Polished to Perfection... Screaming in the liquid Sun' - the writer uses this to emphasise what is on many occasions referring to, water. This enables the addressee to get a clearer image of the water being emphasised by this device.

Oxymoron - 'Liquid sun' - the sun is a giant ball of burning gasses, hence it is contradictory to say that it is liquid. Also, the sun is a particularly important figure when it comes to sustaining life, and so is water, and thus holds **symbolic significance**.

FORM/STRUCTURE

Irregularity - There are irregular lines and irregular stanza lengths. We can interpret this as evoking the scarcity / lack of water at the beginning, in contrast to the gushing water pipe in Stanza 3, which slows a little in Stanza 4. The poem is in **free verse**, which also imitates the lack of regularity in the movement and flow of water.

Enjambment - 'Sometimes, the sudden rush/of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,' - Dharker carries her train of thought from the first sentence of the third stanza through to the second line. Enjambment allows the writer to carry her thoughts or ideas seamlessly to the next line without a grammatical pause.

Caesura - 'a congregation : every man woman/ child for streets around' - There is a pause in the centre of the line after the word 'congregation', which allows us to reflect further on this **abstract noun** and its connotations of spirituality and religious ceremony. It also imitates the moment of shock or curiosity that occurs as spectators observe the broken pipe, before they rush to gather around it and collect the water.

End Stopping - The first, second and final stanza are end stopped - they finish with a full stop/period at the end of the sentence. The third stanza uses **enjambment** to flow on to the next, which signifies the fluidity of the water itself and the outpouring of positive emotions and excitement that the people feel.





ATTITUDES

Water is a blessing - Water is called 'the blessing' at the end of the poem which shows how it is a positive and precious natural resource - the adults use it practically, but the children come out to just enjoy the feeling of it and to play in it.

Communities should work together and share resources - The 'municipal' water pipe is owned by the local government, but clearly the local people don't receive enough water because they rejoice and celebrate when it bursts. There's a suggestion that perhaps this water only goes to those who can afford to pay for it, and that instead it should be shared and distributed equally (sociopolitical message).

Nature is the provider of life, and we should appreciate it - Water is a 'blessing' from nature, as an integral element that is necessary for all life to exist - whether the reader views nature in a spiritual sense as created by God (as those in the poem and the poet herself do), or whether they view it more scientifically and practically, we can all appreciate how beautiful it is and how we as humans are connected to the natural world and dependent upon it as the provider of life.

Spirituality creates hope and faith, which are positive mechanisms in difficult times - There is a positive message about the way in which the health and happiness of the community are restored by their spiritual experience with water - it is almost an act of chance that the pipe bursts, but they count it as a blessing and fully enjoy and appreciate the moment of gushing water, also saving it for later. It could be argued that Dharker feels all blessings (or, for non-religious people, random chance events) should be appreciated and made the most of in the same way.

CONTEXT

- The poem "Blessing," which was first published in 1989 in her book *Purdah*, was inspired by a typical Dharavi slum scene in Mumbai, therefore it has a contemporary feel that complements its literary and figurative elements. It is set in a slum on the outskirts of Mumbai, India, and focuses on the reaction of children who have gathered to celebrate and drink when a pipe bursts.
- Dharker has both Pakistani and Scottish cultural backgrounds, so she has an Eastern and Western heritage and can understand both perspectives on life.
- Many of Dharker's poems explore multicultural experiences, or try to capture a double perspective - in this particular poem, she is exploring how to a Western mind a pipe bursting might just be a chance event, whereas others may interpret it as an act of God and a blessing.
- Dharker also makes films and has made documentaries about people in India, these experiences may also influence the poem.
- Many of Dharker's poems and artistic works also explore the tensions between religious and secular ways of thinking.

THEMES

Water

Life

Hardship

Spirituality

Community

Happiness

Poverty

Relativity

Religion vs Secularism

Eastern vs Western Perspective

TASK

Pick two of these themes, make a mind map and add four separate quotations that relate to it. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the poet's final message or statement about each theme that you chose?

EXERCISES

1. What is the tone of the persona of the poem?
2. Identify and explain instances where the poet uses metaphors in this poem.
3. In what ways does the writer achieve imagery in this poem?
4. Do you think water is a blessing? Explore your own thoughts on the importance of water in our lives.
5. Write a short poem of your own, entitled 'Blessing'. Describe the blessing with a range of sensory imagery.



ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyse the theme of poverty as brought out by Dharker in her poem 'Blessing.'
2. To what extent do you feel sorry for the people in the poem 'Blessing'?
3. How does Dharker explore the relationship between community and spirituality in 'Blessing'?