



HSC English Prescriptions 2019-2023

**English Standard
Module B: Close Study of Literature**

Oodgeroo Noonuccal poetry

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The Past

Let no one say the past is dead.

The past is all about us and within.

Haunted by tribal memories, I know

This little now, this accidental present

Is not the all of me, whose long making

Is so much of the past.

Tonight here in suburbia as I sit

In easy chair before electric heater,

Warmed by the red glow, I fall into dream:

I am away

At the camp fire in the bush, among

My own people, sitting on the ground,

No walls about me,

The stars over me,

The tall surrounding trees that stir in the wind

Making their own music,

Soft cries of the night coming to us, there

Where we are one with all old Nature's lives

Known and unknown,

In scenes where we belong but have now forsaken.

Deep chair and electric radiator

Are but since yesterday,

But a thousand thousand camp fires in the forest

Are in my blood.

Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.

Now is so small a part of time, so small a part

Of all the race years that have moulded me.

China...Woman

September 17, 1984

High peaked mountains
Stand out against the skyline.
The great Wall
Twines itself
Around and over them,
Like my Rainbow Serpent,
Groaning her way
Through ancient rocks.
I hear the heavy tramp
Of the liberating army,
Shaking the mountains loose,
Of rolling stones.
Falling, crushing,
The weeping wild flowers
In their path.
China, the woman,
Stands tall,
Breasts heavy
With the milk of her labours,
Pregnant with expectation.
The ancient Dynasties
Sleep.
Emperors are entombed
In museums.

The people of China
Are now the custodians of palaces.
And the wise old
Lotus plants
Nod their heads
In agreement.

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Reed Flute Cave

Guilin, September 29, 1984

I didn't expect to meet you in Guilin
My Rainbow Serpent,
My Earth Mother,
But you were there
In Reed Flute Cave,
With animals and reptiles
And all those things
You stored in the Dreamtime.
Pools of cool water, like mirrors,
Reflecting your underbelly.

The underground storage place,
Where frogs store water in their stomachs
And mushrooms and every type of fruit,
Vegetable, animal and fish,
Are on display.

Perhaps I have strayed too long
In this beautiful country;
The reed flutes are playing a mournful tune.
The cool air rushing through
The rock cathedral
Reminds me of the sea breezes
Of Stradbroke
And the reed flute seems
To be capturing the scene.
The slippery earth stone floor
Takes me back to mud sea flats,

Where seaweeds communicate with oysters

Fish and crabs.

Have you travelled all this way

To remind me to return home?

Uluru, your resting place in Australia,

Will not be the same without you.

I shall return home,

But I'm glad I came.

Tell me, my Rainbow Spirit

Was there just one of you?

Perhaps, now I have time to think,

Perhaps, you are but one of many guardians

Of earth's peoples,

Just one,

My Rainbow Serpent,

Spirit of my Mother Earth.

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Entombed Warriors

Xian, September 20, 1984

Qin Shi Huang
(first Emperor of China)
Plotted his burial,
With careful and clear detail.
Called in his artists
To prepare for his resurrection.
Clay warriors and horses,
A legion of foot soldiers,
Cavalry,
Archers and Generals.
Swords, lances and spears,
And battle axes in bronze,
His artists made for him,
And
All guarded his secret
For 2,000 years
The Earth Mother
Nursed her son,
Until
By chance,
A pick and shovel,
Revealed his secret.
The earth opened up
And exposed to the world,
His fear,
His insecurity.

Visit to Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall

Guangzhou, October 2, 1984

“Curtain going up”

Echoes and re-echoes

Through the theatre.

The ghosts from the past

Push past me

In the dim lit hall.

Lu Yenghi¹ stands

At the back of the theatre,

With arms folded,

Eyes to the ceiling

Of the exquisite dome

He created,

Many, many moons ago.

The past and present

Unite within my mind

And I spare a moment

to dream the impossible.

I am standing on the stage

Presenting a poetry recital.

The hall is packed

And I am in my element.

The spirits of the past

Are applauding my efforts.

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¹ Hall architect.

Sunrise on Huampu River

Shanghai, September 23, 1984

Oh!

the Huampu River

Is full of life.

It's busy boats

Going from there to there.

Fussy tugs, like clucking hens

Shooing their sister boats,

Out of their way.

Transport boats

Link together, like strings of beads,

Cluttering the waterway.

Overseas liners, proud and aloof,

Stand immobile

At their wharves,

Waiting for their sister tugs,

To get them moving.

On shore,

Chimney stacks,

Billow smoke into the still air.

The sun rises over the horizon,

Streaking the river

With reflections of gold,

Heralding,

The birth of another day.

A Lake Within a Lake

Hangzhou, September 25, 1984

At West Lake there is a Lake

Within a lake.

We reach the island,

Where lotus plants cover the calm waters.

Where water lilies

Settle daintily on their water stems.

Carps break the water

With open mouths

In anticipation of falling crumbs.

The bridge across the island

Zig-zags its way

To confuse demons,

Who need straight paths

To satisfy their evil intent.

Moon pagodas

Stand in the outer lake,

Awaiting the arrival of the full moon,

To record its reflection,

In the water.

Then,
The boat carries us away,
From the peace,
The harmony,
And tranquillity,
That is West Lake.

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