

Comparative Pairings Overview

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How to use this page

Each poem has **three or four recommended pairings**, ranked roughly from strongest to weakest. Every pairing comes with a specific angle — the exact argument you would build a comparative paragraph around. Do not just note that two poems share a theme: identify how they treat it differently or in tension with each other. That contrast is where the marks are.

South — Kamau Brathwaite

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Once Upon a Time

The two speakers share the same structure of longing: both want to return to something they have lost and cannot fully recover. Brathwaite's speaker longs for a physical homeland; Okara's speaker longs for an earlier, authentic self. Compare how both poems use a turning point ("But today I would join you" / "I want to unlearn all these muting things") that is hopeful in tone but unresolved in reality.

- ****vs. *Landscape Painter, Jamaica***** — Both celebrate the Caribbean landscape as a source of identity. Brathwaite's poem constructs identity through memory and return; Virtue's poem constructs it through artistic observation in the present. Compare how each poet makes the landscape feel personally owned.
- ****vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.***** — Both explore what Caribbean identity means across geography. South approaches belonging through longing and memory; West Indies, U.S.A. approaches it through inequality and political theft. Compare the emotional register: personal grief in Brathwaite versus political indignation in Brown.
- ****vs. *It is the Constant Image of Your Face***** — Both speakers are divided between personal attachment and duty to their land. In Brutus, the division is between lover and country; in Brathwaite, it is between the northern city and the island. Compare how each poem resolves (or refuses to resolve) that division.

Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge — William Wordsworth

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: An African Thunderstorm

Both poems present a landscape in motion, but with opposite emotional effects. Wordsworth's city is still, silent, and beautiful precisely because human activity has paused. Rubadiri's storm is violent, chaotic, and destructive. Compare how each poet uses **personification** to give the natural world agency — and what that agency does to the human figures present.

- **vs. *Landscape Painter, Jamaica***** — Both are poems of intense admiration for a landscape. Wordsworth responds to urban London made temporarily natural; Virtue responds to rural Jamaica. Compare the attitude to beauty: Wordsworth experiences it as a spiritual surprise; Virtue's speaker observes it as something elusive and ultimately uncontainable.
- **vs. *A Lesson for This Sunday***** — Both begin with a scene of natural beauty and calm. Walcott's poem ruptures that calm with human cruelty; Wordsworth's does not — the moment holds. Compare what each poem says about the relationship between natural beauty and human moral life.
- **vs. *South***** — Both poems use a specific landscape to explore something larger about the self. Wordsworth's moment is entirely in the present; Brathwaite's is split across time and memory. Compare how each poet uses place as an emotional anchor.

Dulce et Decorum Est — Wilfred Owen

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Death, be not proud

Both poems confront death head-on — but with completely opposite attitudes. Donne mocks death as powerless and temporary; Owen presents death as grotesque, real, and irreversible. The comparison is sharpest on the level of tone: Donne is defiant and almost triumphant; Owen is bitter and accusatory. Consider what each poet's religious or ideological framework allows him to do with death that the other cannot.

- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love***** — Both poems portray organized military violence as a force that destroys innocent life. Owen uses first-person witness to make the horror visceral; Carter uses symbolic imagery ("brown beetles," "man of death") to make it

feel systemic and inescapable. Compare the effect of these two techniques on the reader's emotional response.

- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both poems are fundamentally about what systemic power takes from people. Owen's soldiers are stripped of dignity, movement, and life; Berry's persona is stripped of visibility, education, and freedom. Compare how each poet uses the body as a site of oppression.
- **vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.***** — Both expose official narratives as lies. Owen attacks the Latin lie of patriotic glory; Brown attacks American rhetoric about freedom ("Give me your poor," "Island of the free"). Compare how each poet forces the reader to see the gap between propaganda and reality.

The Woman Speaks to the Man Who Has Employed Her Son — Lorna Goodison

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: My Parents

This is the pairing with the most direct thematic overlap: both poems show parental love overcome by societal forces. In Spender, protection leads to isolation that actually increases the child's vulnerability. In Goodison, total investment and sacrifice are overwhelmed by systemic violence. Compare how each poet uses the parent's perspective to expose the limitations of individual love against structural forces.

- **vs. *Little Boy Crying***** — Both poems explore the parent's hidden emotional world. Morris's father conceals love behind a mask of discipline; Goodison's mother moves from hope to resignation. Compare tone: Morris is tender and quietly ironic; Goodison is mournful and accusatory. Both use the child as the measure of what the parent has lost.
 - **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both show aspirations that society systematically destroys. The boy in Berry's poem wishes for education, freedom, and recognition; the son in Goodison's poem begins with the same potential. Compare how each poet makes the reader feel the weight of unrealized possibility.
 - **vs. *A Stone's Throw***** — Both examine how violence is visited upon the vulnerable while the powerful remain exempt from accountability. Goodison's accusation is directed at the employer; Mitchell's narrator is the one holding the stone. Compare how each poem forces the reader to recognize complicity.
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My Parents — Stephen Spender

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Little Boy Crying

Both poems explore the parent-child relationship from the child's limited perspective. The child in Spender cannot understand why he is kept apart; the child in Morris cannot understand why the blow was struck. Compare how each poem uses perspective to create irony: the child's interpretation is emotionally real but not the whole truth, and the reader is placed to see further than the child can.

- **vs. *The Woman Speaks*** — Both poems use parental love as the lens through which societal failure becomes visible. Spender's parents protect too much; Goodison's mother sacrifices everything. Compare what each poem implies about the relationship between social class, poverty, and parental power.
- **vs. *Birdshooting Season*** — Both explore how children absorb and internalize adult social structures. The boys in Spender reproduce class hostility; the little boys in Senior want to become birdhunters just like their fathers. Compare how each poem shows the next generation inheriting the values of the previous one.
- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy*** — Both depict childhood vulnerability in the face of larger social forces, but from opposite positions. Spender's speaker is middle-class and protected; Berry's persona is Black and excluded. Compare how each poem uses the school as a site of social stratification.

This Is the Dark Time, My Love — Martin Carter

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: An African Thunderstorm

Both poems use the natural world to symbolize colonial invasion and destruction, and both move from an external, approaching threat toward direct impact. Carter's "brown beetles" and Rubadiri's "plague of locusts" and "sinister dark wings" all dehumanize the invading force through natural imagery. Compare how each poet uses the environment's response — personified nature bending, nature in grief — to convey the totality of oppression.

- **vs. *Dulce et Decorum Est*** — Both portray organized military violence as a force that destroys the future and the innocent. Owen's poem addresses a wartime reader; Carter addresses a lover and a nation. Compare the intimacy of address: Owen becomes accusatory ("My friend"); Carter remains tender throughout, which paradoxically intensifies the grief.

- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both poems are about oppression that specifically targets hope and aspiration. Carter's "aiming at your dream" and Berry's twelve unfulfilled wishes describe the same act from different angles. Compare the effect of direct metaphor (Carter) versus the accumulation of individual wishes (Berry) in conveying systemic oppression.
 - **vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.***** — Both poems present colonial authority as something that physically controls where people can and cannot go. Carter's invader walks in the night and tramples the grass; Brown's America keeps people on the plane. Compare how each poem makes control feel spatial and bodily, not just political.
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Birdshooting Season — Olive Senior

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: A Stone's Throw

Both poems expose patriarchal structures in which women are confined to silence, labor, or victimhood while men assert dominance through violence. Senior's poem shows women as "contentless," preparing food for men who hunt; Mitchell's poem shows a woman seized by a crowd of men. Compare how each poem uses the female voice (or its suppression) as the site of the poem's moral critique.

- **vs. *A Lesson for This Sunday***** — Both poems show children witnessing and absorbing adult attitudes toward violence. Senior's little boys want to become hunters; Walcott's children inflict pain with scientific detachment. Compare how each poet implies that cruelty is not innate but learned — or whether Walcott actually suggests it might be.
 - **vs. *The Woman Speaks***** — Both are set in Caribbean communities where male power structures damage women and children. Senior critiques the ritual of hunting as a performance of masculinity; Goodison critiques the gang economy as the extreme of that same logic. Compare the scale of the critique: Senior focuses on cultural tradition; Goodison on its most violent consequence.
 - **vs. *My Parents***** — Both examine how children are socialized into adult roles and hierarchies. In Spender, the child is excluded from the rough boys' world; in Senior, the boys are included in the hunt while girls are kept at the doorstep. Compare how each poem uses the doorstep or threshold as a marker of social division.
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Ol' Higue — Mark McWatt

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Mirror

Both are dramatic monologues in which a female speaker confronts something disturbing about herself. Plath's mirror reveals aging; McWatt's Ol' Higue reveals compulsion and mortality. Both speakers attempt to explain or justify their condition while unable to escape it. Compare the function of the dramatic monologue form in each: both use it to generate sympathy for a figure that society would normally condemn or dismiss.

- **vs. *A Stone's Throw***** — Both poems place a woman at the center of society's moral condemnation. The woman in Mitchell's poem is seized by a crowd; the Ol' Higue is feared and reviled by a community. Compare how each poem shifts perspective to expose the hypocrisy of those doing the judging.
- **vs. *Death, be not proud***** — Both poems engage in an extended rhetorical argument about mortality. Donne challenges death's power; the Ol' Higue argues that she cannot stop herself from trying to cheat death. Compare the tone of defiance in each: Donne is triumphant; McWatt's speaker is frustrated and exhausted.
- **vs. *A Lesson for This Sunday***** — Both suggest that certain dark impulses in human nature are not chosen but compulsive. Walcott's children pick up a pin and destroy a butterfly; the Ol' Higue cannot resist "pure blood." Compare what each poet implies about the relationship between innocence and the capacity for cruelty.

Mirror — Sylvia Plath

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Once Upon a Time

Both poems deal with the painful encounter between a person and an honest reflection of themselves. Plath's woman turns to the mirror hoping for something and finds the truth instead; Okara's speaker looks in the mirror and sees only his fake, social smile. Both poems use the mirror as a symbol of unwanted truth. Compare how each poet frames the relationship between the speaker and their reflection: Plath's speaker is passive and frightened; Okara's is disturbed but not yet changed.

- **vs. *Ol' Higue***** — Both are dramatic monologues exploring female identity, mortality, and compulsion. The Ol' Higue is obsessed with young blood; the woman in Mirror is

obsessed with her fading youth. Compare how each poem uses the body as the site of aging's violence.

- **vs. *A Stone's Throw***** — Both explore women as objects of judgment — one judged by a mob, one judged by the mirror. Compare the source of the judgment: external and collective in Mitchell; internal and inescapable in Plath. Both expose how women are defined by an external gaze they cannot control.
- **vs. *It is the Constant Image of Your Face***** — Both poems feature an image that returns, "perennially accuses," and cannot be escaped. Brutus's lover's face haunts him; the old woman in the mirror rises toward the speaker "day after day." Compare how each poet uses the recurring image as a form of guilt or self-confrontation.

Death, be not proud — John Donne

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Dulce et Decorum Est

This is the most productive contrast in the entire anthology. Donne, writing from Christian faith, mocks death as powerless and temporary. Owen, writing from firsthand experience, presents death as grotesque and final. Compare how the religious/ideological framework of each poet determines his attitude: Donne's argument only works if you accept his theological premises, which Owen's poem systematically demolishes by making death physically real.

- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love***** — Both personify a threatening force — Death, and the "man of death" respectively. Donne strips death of power by addressing it directly; Carter invests it with surveillance and intent. Compare what each poet implies about who controls death: Donne says death is a slave; Carter says death is an agent of the colonial state.
 - **vs. *Ol' Higue***** — Both use extended argumentative monologue to engage with mortality. Compare the attitude of each speaker: Donne is defiant and assured of victory; the Ol' Higue is desperate and exhausted. The contrast in tone exposes how much each argument depends on what the speaker believes waits on the other side.
 - **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both poems respond to a world in which death is an omnipresent threat. Donne counters death with faith; Berry's persona counters it with twelve wishes. Compare how each poem uses hope to resist an overwhelming force — and which is more convincing.
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An African Thunderstorm — David Rubadiri

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: This Is the Dark Time, My Love

Both poems use natural or environmental imagery to make colonial invasion feel inescapable and total. Rubadiri's storm approaches from the west, like a colonial power, and strips the villagers of dignity; Carter's invader walks through the dark and aims at dreams. Compare the technique: Rubadiri sustains the extended metaphor of the storm throughout, while Carter layers symbolic detail. Both poets make the community's vulnerability — not just the individual's — the subject.

- **vs. *Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge***** — The sharpest structural contrast: one poem presents natural force as beautiful and still; the other presents it as violent and chaotic. Both use personification extensively. Compare how the direction of personification differs: Wordsworth's city and river are peaceful and willing; Rubadiri's storm is hungry and invasive.
- **vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.***** — Both present a force arriving from the west that strips Caribbean or African people of something fundamental. Brown's America holds passengers on the plane; Rubadiri's storm strips clothes from bodies. Compare how each poet links the physical exposure of colonized peoples to the political exposure of their societies.
- **vs. *Dulce et Decorum Est***** — Both poems present an overwhelming, destructive force descending on people who are powerless to stop it. Owen's gas comes "softly"; Rubadiri's storm comes with "sinister dark wings." Compare how each poet uses the approach of the destructive force (gradual vs sudden) to build dread.

A Lesson for This Sunday — Derek Walcott

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Birdshooting Season

Both poems explore how violence is passed down through generations, absorbed by children who watch and imitate adults. Senior's little boys want to become hunters; Walcott's children enact the same instinct on a butterfly with a pin. The crucial difference is in implication: Senior suggests the violence is socially constructed and culturally specific; Walcott suggests it may be biologically inherited ("heredity of cruelty"). Compare that distinction carefully.

- **vs. *Once Upon a Time***** — Both poems use an initial scene of peace or innocence that is destroyed. Okara's peace is the remembered past; Walcott's peace is the Sunday

afternoon that the children's cruelty interrupts. Compare how each poem uses the disruption of innocence as its structural turning point.

- **vs. *Ol' Higue***** — Both poems suggest that certain dark impulses are compulsive rather than chosen. Compare how each poet frames that compulsion: Walcott points outward to "heredity of cruelty" as something structural; McWatt has the Ol' Higue confess it as something personal and unwanted.
- **vs. *Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge***** — Both poems use a peaceful natural scene as their opening. Compare how each poet disrupts (or refuses to disrupt) that peace: Wordsworth preserves the moment; Walcott allows it to be violated. This contrast reveals a fundamental difference in their view of human nature's relationship to natural beauty.

Once Upon a Time — Gabriel Okara

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: South

Both poems are structured as a movement from a remembered past toward a desired return — and both end with longing rather than resolution. Brathwaite reaches toward the sea; Okara reaches toward his child. Compare the target of each poem's nostalgia: Brathwaite mourns a place; Okara mourns a quality of self. Both use the word "recapture"/"unlearn" to show that the return must be active, not passive.

- **vs. *Mirror***** — Both poems confront a speaker with a version of themselves they do not recognize or accept. Plath's woman sees the old woman rising from the lake; Okara's speaker sees only his own teeth in the mirror. Compare how each poem uses the mirror as a symbol: in *Mirror* it is truth-telling and pitiless; in *Once Upon a Time* it is the site of the speaker's self-disgust.
- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both poems explore the suppression of authentic selfhood under external pressure. In *Okara*, a man learns to perform social roles until his real self disappears; in *Berry*, a boy's natural impulse to raise his hand is suppressed by the weight of racism. Compare the agent of suppression: in *Okara* it is societal materialism; in *Berry* it is racial oppression.
- **vs. *Little Boy Crying***** — In both poems, the child is the carrier of an authentic emotion the adult has lost. *Okara*'s speaker asks his son to teach him how to laugh; *Morris*'s father "dare not ruin the lessons" because the lesson is precisely for the child. Compare how each poem assigns the child the role of moral teacher — and what that says about the adult's condition.

West Indies, U.S.A. — Stewart Brown

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Test Match Sabina Park (same author)

Both poems are by Stewart Brown and both use a specific, grounded setting — an aeroplane window, a cricket ground — as a lens for examining race and power in the postcolonial Caribbean. In *West Indies, U.S.A.* the power imbalance is between America and the Caribbean; in *Test Match Sabina Park* it is between England and the West Indies. Compare how Brown uses physical spaces (airports, cricket grounds) as microcosms of colonial power, and how the direction of power shifts between the two poems.

- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love*** — Both poems present colonial authority as something that physically controls movement and space. Compare the methods of control: Carter's invader moves through the land at night; Brown's America keeps its subjects on the plane. Both make control feel spatial and bodily.
- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy*** — Both are explicit critiques of racial discrimination as a systemic and structural force. Brown's poem operates at the level of nations; Berry's operates at the level of one child's daily experience. Compare how scale affects emotional impact: the macro-political critique in Brown versus the intimate personal longing in Berry.
- **vs. *An African Thunderstorm*** — Both poems present an external force — American imperialism, a colonial storm — that comes from the west and disrupts or destroys what it encounters. Compare the way each poet makes the force feel both real and symbolic.

Test Match Sabina Park — Stewart Brown

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: *Dreaming Black Boy*

Both poems hinge on the moment when racial pride collapses in the face of a reality that does not recognize it. The Englishman's "rosette of skin" is tarnished; Berry's boy holds back the answer he knows. Compare the direction of the racial power dynamic: in Berry, the Black persona is suppressed by white authority; in Brown, the white persona is humiliated by Black cultural force. The poems mirror each other structurally.

- **vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.*** — Both are by Stewart Brown; compare his techniques. Both use a specific Caribbean setting as a site of postcolonial encounter. In *Test Match*,

Brown inhabits the perspective of the colonial figure; in West Indies, U.S.A. he occupies the perspective of the observer. Compare what each choice of speaker allows him to do — and what it forces the reader to confront.

- **vs. *Once Upon a Time***** — Both poems trace the collapse of a persona's false identity. Okara's speaker performs social faces until the mask becomes permanent; Brown's Englishman wears his racial pride as a "rosette" until it is tarnished. Compare the mechanism of collapse: in *Once Upon a Time* it is a slow social process; in *Test Match* it is a sudden, humiliating public exposure.
- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love***** — Both poems depict the dismantling of colonial authority — one in a cricket ground, one under military occupation. Compare the emotional register: Brown's poem ends in embarrassment and irony; Carter's ends in grief and political urgency. What does each register reveal about the nature of colonial power in each context?

Dreaming Black Boy — James Berry

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: *This Is the Dark Time, My Love*

Both poems show oppression as something that specifically targets hope, aspiration, and the future. Carter's invader is "aiming at your dream"; Berry's persona wishes for education, free movement, and recognition — all of which racism denies. Compare the form: Carter uses symbolism and metaphor; Berry uses the accumulation of twelve wishes. Both techniques produce the same emotional weight, but by opposite means — indirect and direct.

- **vs. *Once Upon a Time***** — Both poems trace the psychological damage done when external forces cause a person to suppress their authentic responses. In Berry, the boy holds back an answer he knows; in Okara, the adult has learned to respond with performed smiles. Compare the scale of the damage: Berry's is imposed from outside by racism; Okara's is self-imposed through social conditioning.
- **vs. *The Woman Speaks***** — Both show aspirations destroyed by forces beyond the individual's control. In Berry, the boy's potential is blocked at every level; in Goodison, the son's potential is redirected into violence. Compare how each poet makes the reader feel the specific weight of "lost potential" — through the persona's own voice in Berry, through the mother's grief in Goodison.
- **vs. *My Parents***** — Both poems are set partly in or around a school and explore childhood vulnerability within a stratified society. Compare the source of the vulnerability: in Spender, it comes from class; in Berry, it comes from race. Both poems use the schoolroom or classroom as a space where power is distributed unequally.

Little Boy Crying — Mervyn Morris

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: My Parents

Both poems use the parent-child relationship to explore how perception differs from reality within a family. The child in Spender cannot understand his parents' choices; the child in Morris cannot understand the father's blow. Compare the ironic structure: in both poems, the reader sees more than the child does. The key difference is perspective — Spender writes from the child's retrospective memory; Morris writes from a third-person observer who can access both the child's imagination and the father's hidden feeling.

- **vs. *The Woman Speaks***** — Both poems explore the emotional interior of a parent. Morris's father hides love behind discipline; Goodison's mother hides grief behind prayer. Compare how each poet makes the parent's suppressed emotion the actual subject of the poem, rather than the visible behavior.
- **vs. *Once Upon a Time***** — Both poems position the child as the keeper of authentic emotion that the adult has lost. In Okara, the speaker asks his son to teach him how to laugh again; in Morris, the father longs to "lift you, curb your sadness" but has set that aside. Compare how the child functions as a moral benchmark in each poem.
- **vs. *A Lesson for This Sunday***** — Both poems use a parent observing a child as the poem's frame. In Morris, the parent is the cause of the child's pain; in Walcott, the adult is the observer of children inflicting pain on a creature. Compare what each poem implies about the adult's responsibility for what the child learns or does.

Landscape Painter, Jamaica — Vivian Virtue

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: South

Both poems use the Jamaican / Caribbean landscape as the primary vehicle for exploring identity, belonging, and cultural pride. Brathwaite's speaker constructs identity through memory and longing for a landscape he has left; Virtue's speaker constructs it through present observation of a landscape being painted. Compare the mood of each: South is elegiac and searching; Landscape Painter is celebratory and playful. Both ultimately suggest the landscape cannot be fully possessed or captured.

- **vs. *Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge***** — Both are poems of intense admiration for a landscape. Compare the experience of beauty in each: Wordsworth's moment is fleeting, unexpected, and spiritually overwhelming; Virtue's painter prepares carefully for the perfect moment that the hills frustrate. Both suggest that beauty resists being fixed — by language or by paint.
- **vs. *An African Thunderstorm***** — Both poems observe a landscape from a slight remove, and both animate the landscape through personification. Compare the mood of the personification: Virtue's mountains are dignified and playful; Rubadiri's storm is predatory and destructive. What does each poet's choice of mood reveal about their relationship to the landscape?
- **vs. *West Indies, U.S.A.***** — Both poems engage with Caribbean identity and place, but from opposite emotional directions. Virtue celebrates the landscape with warmth and irony; Brown exposes how Caribbean spaces have been shaped by colonial theft. Compare what each poem implies is the relationship between landscape and ownership.

A Stone's Throw — Elma Mitchell

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: Birdshooting Season

Both poems expose patriarchal structures that silence or harm women, and both use an apparently "normal" social event — a hunt, an execution — to reveal the violence embedded within cultural tradition. Senior's poem uses quiet understatement and the girls' whispered resistance; Mitchell's poem uses the brutal candour of the perpetrator's own voice. Compare how different narrative perspectives (observer vs. perpetrator) affect the reader's response to male violence.

- **vs. *Ol' Higue***** — Both poems center on a woman who is defined by, blamed by, and judged by the community that surrounds her. The Ol' Higue argues against her own reputation; the woman in A Stone's Throw is seized and nearly killed for hers. Compare how each poem subverts the expected moral position: McWatt makes the monster sympathetic; Mitchell makes the righteous crowd monstrous.
- **vs. *Dreaming Black Boy***** — Both poems expose how "justice" and "virtue" are used to mask cruelty directed at the powerless. The crowd claims virtue; the racial structures Berry critiques claim neutrality. Compare how each poet strips away that claim — through dramatic irony in Mitchell, through the accumulation of denied wishes in Berry.
- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love***** — Both poems present a violent force that operates under the cover of authority and legitimacy. Carter's invader comes in darkness;

Mitchell's crowd comes in daylight with the law on their side. Compare how each poem makes visible the gap between legal/political legitimacy and moral reality.

It is the Constant Image of Your Face — Dennis Brutus

Exam Tip

Strongest pairing: South

Both poems are structured around a divided loyalty between the speaker's love of a place or person and a competing obligation. Brathwaite's speaker is divided between the cold north and the Caribbean; Brutus's speaker is divided between his lover and his country. Compare how each poet uses the imagery of water and the body: Brathwaite wants to be "borne down the years" of the river toward the sea; Brutus inhabits "a world of knives." Both suggest that the resolution lies not in choosing but in finding a way to carry both.

- **vs. *This Is the Dark Time, My Love***** — Both poems set romantic love against a background of political oppression — Carter's colonial Guyana, Brutus's apartheid South Africa. Compare how each poet uses the lover as a symbol of what oppression threatens to destroy: Carter's love is addressed directly as something that must survive; Brutus's lover is the one who has caused him to "betray" his political commitment.
 - **vs. *Mirror***** — Both poems feature an image that "perennially accuses" and returns without end. Plath's old woman rises from the lake each morning; Brutus's lover's face is "constant," always framed in his hands. Compare how each poet uses the returning image as a form of inescapable self-confrontation.
 - **vs. *Once Upon a Time***** — Both poems involve a speaker confessing to a form of emotional betrayal. Okara has become the very thing he criticizes; Brutus has betrayed his country's claim on his full loyalty. Compare the tone of each confession: Okara is dismayed and urgent; Brutus is measured and legal in register. Both end without full resolution.
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Remember

The most versatile poems for comparison — the ones that connect to the widest range of partners:

- **Dreaming Black Boy** connects to almost everything involving oppression, childhood, and suppressed aspiration
- **Once Upon a Time** connects across nostalgia, identity, loss of innocence, and truth vs performance
- **This Is the Dark Time, My Love** connects across political poems, war poems, and oppression poems
- **A Stone's Throw** connects across gender, judgment, hypocrisy, and religion poems
- **South** connects across identity, belonging, homeland, and nostalgia poems

Pairings to avoid unless the angle is very precise:

- Sonnet Upon Westminster Bridge with anything political — Wordsworth's poem has no political dimension; forcing one creates a weak argument
- Landscape Painter with war or oppression poems — the tonal mismatch undermines the comparison unless you are explicitly arguing by contrast