

Name: _____ () Class: _____ Date: _____

Tissue

Paper that lets the light
shine through, this
is what could alter things.
Paper thinned by age or touching,

the kind you find in well-used books, 5
the back of the Koran, where a hand
has written in the names and histories,
who was born to whom,

the height and weight, who 10
died where and how, on which sepia date,
pages smoothed and stroked and turned
transparent with attention.

If buildings were paper, I might
feel their drift, see how easily
they fall away on a sigh, a shift 15
in the direction of the wind.

Maps too. The sun shines through
their borderlines, the marks
that rivers make, roads,
railtracks, mountainfolds, 20

Fine slips from grocery shops
that say how much was sold
and what was paid by credit card
might fly our lives like paper kites.

An architect could use all this, 25
place layer over layer, luminous
script over numbers over line,
and never wish to build again with brick

or block, but let the daylight break
through capitals and monoliths, 30
through the shapes that pride can make,
find a way to trace a grand design

with living tissue, raise a structure
never meant to last,
of paper smoothed and stroked 35
and thinned to be transparent,

turned into your skin.

(by Imtiaz Dharker)

Stanza 1 to 3

- 1 Using appropriate evidence, state two characteristics that the poet gives to paper in stanza 1.

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.....[2]

- 2 Give one impression of the persona who has recorded "the names and histories" (line 7) on the paper found at the "back of the Koran" (line 6). Explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....[2]

- 3 What phrase (*5 words or less*) in stanza 3 tells you about the piece of paper's importance? Explain your answer.

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.....

.....

.....[2]

Stanza 4, 5 and 6

- 4 Which two words in stanza 4 indicate that the poet has shifted to rhetorical and/or imaginative language?

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.....[1]

- 5** Which alliterative phrase (*5 words or less*) emphasises how fragile these buildings are? Explain your answer.

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.....

.....[2]

- 6a** What do each of these symbolise: "buildings" (line 13), "Maps" (line 17) and "Fine slips from grocery shops" (line 21) ?

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.....[2]

- 6b** Explain the symbolism of these objects as a whole.

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.....[1]

- 7a** Explain one denotation and connotation of the sun shining through the "borderlines" of maps [2]

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.....[2]

- 7b** Is this image in **7a** similar to or different from the "Fine slips" (line 21) "fly[ing] our lives like paper kites" (line 24)? Explain your answer.

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.....[2]

Stanza 7 to 9

- 8** With reference to any one phrase (*5 words or less*) in stanzas 7 to 9, explain any two characteristics of buildings built with "brick / or block" (lines 28 – 29)
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-[2]
- 9** An architect may want to use "living tissue" to "raise a structure / never meant to last" (lines 33 – 34). What is oxymoronic or contradictory about this desire?
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-[2]

Stanza 9 and 10

- 10a** What device does the poet employ when including "living tissue" (line 33) and "skin" (line 37) within the extended metaphor of paper?
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-[1]
- 10b** What two characteristics of paper does the poet suggest apply to human beings as well? Explain your answer with reference to any two quotations in the poem.
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-[4]

Suggested Answer Scheme

Stanza 1 to 3

Q1. Using appropriate evidence, state two characteristics that the poet gives to paper in stanza 1 [2]

Students may give any two of the following possible answers:

- It is transparent because it "lets the light / shine through". [2]
- It is powerful because it "could alter things" [2]
- It is thin, where it is "thinned by age or touching" [2]

Q2. Give one impression of the persona who has recorded "the names and histories" (line 7) on the paper found at the "back of the Koran" (line 6). Explain your answer. [2]

- Impressions:
 - Conscientious
 - Devoted
 - Religious
 - Consistent
 - Attentive
 - Careful
 - Places emphasis on history / heritage [1]
- Explanations:
 - Conscientious: The person has recorded the minute details of his family history, including "height and weight" (line 9)
 - Devoted: This person has recorded historical events over a period of time, with some of the inscriptions ageing into "sepia date(s)" (line 10).
 - Careful / Attentive: The person has treated the paper with care, even as it has been intensively used: "smoothed and stroked and turned / transparent with attention" (line 11 – 12) [1]

Accept any possible answers.

Q3. What phrase (5 words or less) in stanza 3 tells you about the piece of paper's importance? Explain your answer. [2]

- Phrase: "turned / transparent with attention" OR "smoothed and stroked and turned" [1]
- Explanation:
 - The poet suggests that the paper has been thinned by touch, which connotes that it contains something highly precious to the reader, who frequently turns the page to read or write in it [1]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional to mention use of metaphor / hyperbole ("turned transparent") or repetition / rhythm ("and ... and ...") Also accept explanations about paper being important because it is used for recording one's family history if student answers mention the constant <u>activity</u> / <u>interaction</u> (touch) / <u>care</u> taken to update records.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Stanza 4, 5 and 6</u></p> <p>Q4. Which <u>two</u> words in stanza 4 indicate that the poet has shifted to rhetorical and/or imaginative language? [1]</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "If" and "might" (line 13) [1]
<p>Q5. Which alliterative phrase (5 words or less) emphasises how fragile these buildings are? Explain your answer. [2]</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phrase: "a sigh, a shift" (line 15) [1] Explanation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poet uses <u>alliteration</u> in the words "sigh" and "shift", which echoes other consonants in "see" (line 14). The repetition of the 's' sound has the <u>effect of weightlessness</u>, which conveys the the fragility of paper buildings. [1] [OPTIONAL] Classroom Extension: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher can also draw attention to the use of <u>assonance</u> in the words "feel", "drift", "sigh", "shift" and/or "wind". The effect of this repetition of the 'i' vowel is to convey a constant sense of movement and weightlessness and the fragility of paper buildings. Teacher can also draw attention to the 'f' sounds in "feel", "drift", "fall" and "shift". High progress learners may be able to indicate some understanding of the clustering of 'f' and 's' sounds (fricatives).
<p>Q6a. What do each of these symbolise: "buildings" (line 13), "Maps" (line 17) and "Fine slips from grocery shops" (line 21)? [2]</p>
<p><i>Award ½ mark each if student successfully explains "buildings" and "maps". 1 mark for "fine slips" – as students must also understand that these refer to receipts.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symbols of human <u>effort / endeavour</u> Can represent human <u>pride</u> e.g. commemorative buildings History / Art Protection / Shelter etc. [½]

- Maps
 - Wayfinding
 - Geography
 - Navigation
 - Routes
 - Connections etc. [½]
- Fine slips (Receipts)
 - Costs / expenses of living
 - Transactions necessary for survival
 - Economic systems etc. [1]

Accept other possible answers.

Q6b. Explain the symbolism of these objects as a whole. [1]

- They are ways of organising human activity / human activity / everyday objects or actions [1]
 - Higher level response: As a whole, they represent society / social structures / human structures / ways of understanding the world / ways to see or interact with the world

Q7a. Explain one denotation and connotation of the sun shining through the "borderlines" of maps [2]

- When the light shines through the map, it denotes that
 - the map becomes transparent. [1] This transparency connotes how the "borderlines" and "marks", or manmade divisions become irrelevant or destroyed. [1] **OR**
 - the lines in the map become more apparent. [1] These lines include "borderlines", "roads" and "railtracks". This connotes how human ingenuity is emphasised in terms of the way we find ways to connect across vast distances. [1]

Q7b. Is this image similar to or different from the "Fine slips" (line 21) "fly[ing] our lives like paper kites" (line 24)? Explain your answer. [2]

- Similar:
 - Receipts are likened to "paper kites" which "fly our lives". This connotes how one might see that the burdens of life, such as expenses, are really pieces of paper. This realisation might cause our stresses to "fly" away, or leave our lives. [1]
 - This is similar to how the manmade divisions in the map disappear, to suggest that there are no boundaries. [1]

Accept other possible explanations if they are logical. It is possible to accept answers for "different". However, since the 3 symbols are related to the positive properties of paper, a holistic interpretation of the poem will involve seeing the similarities between the 3 symbols.

Do not doubly-penalise students if their initial explanation for the symbolism of "fine slips" (Q6a) was incorrect.

Stanza 7 to 9

Q8. With reference to any one phrase (5 words or less) in stanzas 7 to 8, explain any two characteristics of buildings built with "brick / or block" (lines 28 – 29) [2]

- "capitals and monoliths" (line 30) [1]
 - These buildings are built to commemorate and memorialise / to show power [1]
- "shapes that pride can make" (line 31) [1]
 - These buildings are built to memorialise or to show off one's achievements / they are durable and meant to preserve these achievements for posterity. [1]

Two characteristics explained using one quote required for the full mark; this will help students unpack the dense language that Dharker uses in these stanzas.

Q9. An architect may want to use "living tissue" to "raise a structure / never meant to last" (lines 33 – 34). What is oxymoronic or contradictory about this desire? [1]

- Architects who design buildings typically intend for their structures to last / be permanent. [1] However, the poet seems to be saying that the most desirable / beautiful structures are those precisely meant to be temporary / ephemeral / transient. [1]

Students must provide two words that convey this contradiction to be awarded the full mark (e.g. permanent vs transient, to last vs temporary)

Stanza 9 and 10

Q10a. What device does the poet employ when including "living tissue" (line 33) and "skin" (line 37) within the extended metaphor of paper? [1]

- Pun [1]
 - Tissue now connects sheets / layers of paper and the type of material which makes up the body.

Q10b. What two characteristics of paper does the poet suggest apply to human beings as well? Explain your answer with reference to any two quotations in the poem. [4]

Accept any two valid points:

- That we are fragile like paper [1]
 - "a structure / never meant to last" (line 33 – 34)
 - Age and use / activity renders us frail and fragile ("thinned by age or touching") [1]
- Yet, we are also surprisingly strong / strong in other aspects, just like paper [1]
 - Paper and skin can be used to "trace a grand design" (line 32), to take on or contain things / concepts / ideas greater than our outward appearances may suggest. These include aspects of human experience such as history, family and or spirituality (stanza 1), including our "names and histories" [1]
- That beauty may well lie in fragility rather than strength [1]
 - Paper remains transparent no matter how many layers, "layer over layer" (line 26). are laid. They let "the daylight break / through" (line 29) and are "luminous" (line 26), symbolising goodness, truth and/or purity.
 - The symbolism of light and beauty take precedence in the poem over the ways we try to organise, rationalise and/or control our experience (maps, economic systems including jobs, livelihoods), and especially the ways we try to memorialise our pride and power in "the shapes that pride can make" (line 31).
 - Similarly, human interaction may lead us vulnerable in being "smoothed and stroked / and thinned to be transparent" (lines 36 – 37) like paper. Yet, this very fragility allows light to fill our lives. [1]

JEAN TAY: *Boom*

Answer the essay question **(a)** and the passage-based question **(b)**.

- (a)** At the start of the play Agent 1 says, "The more unattainable the vision, the more their hearts will desire it." How far does Tay persuade you to agree?

And (b) Read this passage carefully, and then answer the questions that follow it

Mother How dare you? How could I have raised a lousy, good-for-nothing *(throws a statue)*... Heartless, money grubbing *(throws another)*... Bastard like you!

Boon Oi! Stop it!

Mother You don't tell me what to do! 5
Boon grabs his mother, to keep her from destroying more statues.

Boon Ma! Le xiao ah¹? *(but she throws another statue, carried away by her anger)* I said stop that!

Mother Why should I listen to you? You... Murderer!

Boon I don't care what you call me, Ma. I should have done it years ago. 10

Mother How dare you?
She picks up another statue to throw.

Boon Stop it, Ma! Or you'll have nothing left. *(she pauses, mid-throw)*
Look, if this is the only way to get you out of here, then that's what I got to do. 15

Mother I'm not going anywhere.

Boon You want me to drag you kicking and screaming out of here?
He reaches out for her, but she flinches.

Mother You don't touch me! I don't need you, okay?
I don't need anybody. Just my house... My tree! 20

Boon What? You think that if I left your tree alone, everything will be okay is it? You think the developers will build a little fence around it and leave it in the middle of their condo? Nobody can save that tree, Ma.

Mother I don't want to go. I want to die here, with my tree. Why can't I die here? 25

Boon Because I won't let you. Ma. There's nothing left. Nothing. He's gone. The house is gone. The tree is gone. You only got me, okay? Come on, Ma. Is that stupid tree so much more important than me? *(she refuses to answer. He gives up.)* Fine. Then take it with you. I don't care. Drag it along with you, stuff it in your cupboard, under 30

	your bed. But we got to go, Ma. <i>Pause, as Mother struggles to accept the truth. Finally she speaks.</i>	
Mother	(quietly) You say... I... I can take the tree? <i>Boon nods.</i>	35
Mother	So big... How to take?	
Boon	What to do? Hire lorry, lor. <i>Slowly, she nods. Boon squats down to pick up the broken fragments. He holds out a piece.</i>	
Boon	So how? Malacca 1974? <i>She shrugs. Boon looks at the broken statue for a while, then goes and gets something from the drawer.</i>	40
Mother	Le zor si mi ² ?	
Boon	Scotch tape. <i>She shakes her head, resigned.</i>	45
Mother	Fix for what? <i>But he squats down and starts taping the broken statue together.</i>	
Mother	Wah... Jing pai kua ³ leh.	
Boon	Wah zai ⁴ . <i>They squat on the floor, picking up the pieces. Mother moves offstage, but Boon remains, picking up the pieces.</i>	50

¹ le xiao ah [Hokkien] are you crazy

² le zor si mi [Hokkien] what are you doing

³ jing pai kua [hokkien] very ugly

⁴ wah zai [Hokkien] I know

- (i) How does Tay vividly convey the tensions between parent and child in **this passage**?
- (ii) Explore **one** other moment in the play where Tay vividly conveys the tensions between parent and child.

Suggested Answers

(a)	At the start of the play Agent 1 says, "The more unattainable the vision, the more their hearts will desire it." How far does Tay persuade you to agree?
<p><i>Setter's comments:</i> The paragraphs below outline <u>some possible points</u> that students may provide. Good candidates will pick up on the idea of contradiction or oxymoron in the given quote: where people desire what they are most unable to achieve. While the examples given are based on Mother, Boon and Jeremiah, other possible examples include Corpse's desire to "leave something behind", or to "go back" to his family, right before his fatal accident. Such discussion could also be extended to include Corpse's history as Young Father.</p>	
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The more unattainable the vision, the more their hearts will desire it." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Said in the context of the real estate agents extolling ways to persuade people to buy property, which in turn contributes to their own fortunes ○ Speaks to <u>greed</u>, <u>social notions of a good / better life</u>, and the impetus for <u>progress</u>, <u>renewal and redevelopment</u> that drives the play. • Stand: Tay <u>successfully</u> persuades audiences to <u>a large extent</u>. Nonetheless, she also provides us with a glimpse of an alternative vision where individuals such as Jeremiah <u>resist socially established norms and visions of unattainable progress</u>.
Boon as desirous of a better, more materially abundant life despite its unattainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon desires "an amazing view of the sea" and to "Migrate to another country" (Act 1 Scene 2). He desires experiences that require him to drastically alter his life, including acquiring vast material wealth and uprooting himself and his mother. • He is <u>absorbed</u> in his reverie, attempting to convince his mother to "Imagine snowflakes drifting down, melting when they touch your skin". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The combination of present participles ("-ing") and 'f' fricatives in 'snowflakes' and 'drifting' conveys the gentle allure of Boon's fantasies. ○ Mother cuts through the fantasies by telling him "open freezer can see already what", but Boon insists that it is "Not the same". While this is true, it suggests that for Boon, it is the <u>promise of what lies ahead, is exotic, and unattainable</u>, that continues to attract him

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Later, Boon attempts to convince his mother into sharing his property dreams by <u>painting a picture of endless possibilities for her</u>: “we can buy a really nice place. And I mean a really nice place. Eh, you want to stay semi-D also can. Even a bungalow” (Act 1 Scene 7). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boon’s <u>slick, attractive visions</u> are the hallmark of a <u>consummate salesperson</u>, sparking <u>limitless possibilities</u> in his audience’s mind. • Boon is also convinced that these visions are the product of <u>ambition</u>, where he sees the <u>money-making potential</u> that others cannot. (Act 1 Scene 7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Part of his role as a real estate investor is to identify potential value in units ○ He <u>paints visions of future prosperity</u> to Mother in an attempt to convince her to agree to an en-bloc sale: “I tell you, this place got potential to become really classy”, asking her to trust his expertise. ○ He attempts to convince the neighbours by promising value beyond his sellers’ <u>wildest dreams</u>: “I bet some of these uncles never even dreamed of earning that much money in their lifetime”. ○ He attempts to <u>motivate</u> his neighbours by the <u>promise of hitherto (until now) impossible upward mobility</u>. • Mother understands that youth is partly what drives this desire for the unattainable: “They’re young what. They’re future all ahead of them. ... We’ve got no future. Only got our past. And our past is here” (Act 1 Scene 10) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The need for youth to make something of their lives
<p>Boon also wants to be his own person, to be rid of his father’s influence <u>despite</u> sharing many of the same dreams as his father</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon bitterly asks himself, “But how to erase the history of your own life?” (Act 1 Scene 5). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ His desire to sell the Zion Mansion apartment is partially motivated by his desire to come to terms with his father’s abandonment. • For Boon, moving is part of <u>action, progress</u> and <u>moving forward</u>, rather than waiting “for somebody else to come and rescue me”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While we admire his determination to “do the rescuing” himself, Boon can <u>never fully be rid of his father’s influence</u>, or to “erase” his own history. Yet, <u>he is so desirous of this unattainable</u>

	<p><u>outcome that he hurts others</u>, cutting down the very tree that is at the centre of his mother's meaning and existence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boon also admits, later in a <u>monologue</u>, that as he was chained to the tree, he began devising ways to "leave the house, leave the tree, escape the chain". Yet, try as he would he to accumulate material wealth and escape his personal history, even "spend 10 million dollars on a penthouse", he admits that it would make no "difference" (Act 2 Scene 4). ● Boon <u>does not realise</u> that he and his father are motivated by the same promise of <u>escape</u> and the unattainable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Right after Act 1 Scene 8, where Boon attempts to convince Mother that they can move to a landed property, Tay <u>juxtaposes</u> Young Father's exact same promises. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He says, "Next time, when I make enough money, I'll buy you a big bungalow, want or not?" Young Mother's reply, that "Your dreams are too big for me", <u>foreshadows</u> (dramatic irony) the debt that Young Father will accumulate in pursuit of his dreams. ○ Boon's invitation to Mother to see snow (Act 1 Scene 2) is poignantly reminiscent of Young Father's promise to bring Young Mother and Boon to the mountains: "then you can see snow, and Ah Boy can build snowman and learn how to ski". (Act 1 Scene 17). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He promises that Mother he'll "always come home, as long as you're here". Tragically, Young Father keeps neither of these promises. ○ For Boon to share the same dreams as his father, while wanting to erase his history, <u>ironically</u> conveys to the audience that Boon's ambitions may eventually be similarly destructive.
<p>Mother desires a reunion with a husband <u>despite</u> the fact that it is no</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mother too has unattainable desires in her nostalgia, where she wishes for space and place to remain static because they <u>situate her memories</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ She rhetorically remarks to her neighbour, when recalling Boon dressing up as superman: "How

<p>longer possible. She persists in her hope <u>even in the face of</u> (and perhaps because of) considerable opposition.</p>	<p>much can they give me, for a memory like that?" (Act 1 Scene 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This quote shows that Mother's memories are <u>situated in place</u>, and Mother desires that space and place remain unchanged for her to <u>preserve her memories</u>. Of course, this is nearly impossible within the context of the play. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>In another instance</u>, in Scene 13, Mother humorously asks Boon to taste the walls. Mother reminds Boon, rather literally, that the taste of the wall is her sweat: "my sweat ... My Blood" that have "seep into the walls of the house". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mother reminds Boon of the <u>labour</u> that she has expended within and on the house that make it <u>an extension of her</u>. • Yet, as the play shows, Mother fights a futile battle against the breakneck speed of national progress. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the next scene (12), the civil servants whose goal is to optimise land use rubbish her complaint letter: "The estate is how old already, but she's going on and on about her fig tree ... Sentimental value blah blah blah. Like that also can". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Her concerns seem <u>extremely insignificant</u> in the face of larger priorities, policies which are precisely designed to be "Nothing personal" (Act 1 Scene 12), as Jeremiah admits. <u>Yet, it is precisely this unattainability that Mother continues to desire.</u>
<p>The setting also conveys society's <u>irrepressible march toward progress</u>, as individuals chase the goals they cannot attain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cemetery is being relinquished for land-use needs, which is particularly urgent in the context of a construction / property boom, as the title references. • The booming sound that reverberates through the play is a reminder of society's relentless march toward a <u>never-complete (and hence, unattainable) ideal of progress</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For instance, the booming sound that deeply disturbs Corpse (Act 1 Scene 6) <u>transits</u> into the sound of Mother pounding garlic (Act 1 Scene 7). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sound opens the scene where Boon attempts to convince Mother to sell the apartment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sounds of Mother's domestic simplicity threaten to be overwhelmed / are preceded by society's narratives of progress. • When the loansharks arrive at the door (Act 2 Scene 1), there is again a "<i>Loud rhythmic banging/booming at the door</i>". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This represents the harm that Young Father has unwittingly subjected his family to, in his pursuit of a better life, as the loansharks return to collect his debts. • In terms of the <u>setting</u>, it is deeply saddening that the loansharks have vandalised the walls of the house that Mother considers so precious to her: "I'll die before I let you paint on my walls again" (Act 1 Scene 1)
<p><u>Contrast:</u></p> <p>Jeremiah eventually rejects an "unattainable vision" of <u>clinical, impersonable policymaking</u> as a bureaucrat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremiah has the thankless task of communicating with the dead – informing them that their graves will either be exhumed or they will be reburied under government policy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is an <u>ironic</u> plot point, because the dead cannot literally speak. It is an <u>unattainable</u> vision to convince the dead, but even so, Jeremiah tries in earnest, trying to inform the Corpse (Father) of "The sound of construction. The sound of progress", and the need to "ensure optimal land use". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The bureaucratic tone which Jeremiah initially adopts signals his initial acceptance of the vision of progress and forward movement. ○ Indeed, Jeremiah insults Corpse when the latter stubbornly refuses to provide further information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jeremiah says that that he is "nothing ... Just a lump of rotten flesh and bone ... taking up unnecessary space in the ground" (Act 1 Scene 18). However, it is clear that Jeremiah here is on the losing end. • We are reminded throughout the play that the civil servants desire nothing more than frigid impartiality: of sticking to one's "job scope" (Act 2 Scene 11) and to "optimise our most precious resource" for the most deserving users (Act 1 Scene 3).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yet, Jeremiah <u>ultimately rejects</u> the <u>clinical language of impartiality</u> which his ministry aspires to. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Director ironically insists: “here you are talking about ... People? We have priorities, Jeremiah!”, plainly stating that the policies they plan do not (and cannot) consider the people that will be governed within them. (Act 2 Scene 11) ○ At the end of the scene, Jeremiah rejects the rigid demands of his job: “Screw the PQ!”, in <u>strong, unequivocal</u> language, where he realises that he “care[s] about what happens to somebody other than myself”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This notion of care prevents him from aspiring to the <u>unattainable</u> notion of impartiality his colleagues aspire to. • Another of Jeremiah’s unattainable desires would be his desire to know what cremation feels like. While the Corpse is unable to give him what he wishes, Jeremiah is at peace: “At least, I don’t hear her screaming anymore”, with reference to his mother. (Scene 9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing this moment with Corpse enables the latter to recall the fig tree, a crucial plot point. It suggests that this moment of acceptance provides a way forward for both characters.
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Jean Tay notes, part of the reason for her writing of the play was that she “had begun to wonder whether progress and prosperity could really be as destructive a force as an economic meltdown” (Introduction). • The play is driven by conflicting, overlapping desires which are often at odds with one another, and which play out against one another with devastating effects (e.g. Boon vs Mother, Jeremiah vs Mother, Boon vs Father). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These characters <u>represent / index</u> issues such as progress vs heritage, mobility vs contentedness, aspirations vs relationships • The play reveals the social pressures that drive personal desires, and which continue to appeal to us precisely because they are unrealistic. • As audiences, we may well be more sympathetic towards the desires that, while unattainable, come about as a result of grief and mourning (Mother), or as a way of negotiating childhood drama (Boon).

b (i)	How does Tay vividly convey the tensions between parent and child in this passage ?
<p><u>Setter's comments:</u> This is Act 2 Scene 18.</p> <p><i>The best scripts will show how neither Mother nor Boon are wholly 'right' in the tragic climax of this argument, which shows the intractable unpredictability of parent-child relationships. The best scripts will also note the way the scene is surprisingly resolved using humour.</i></p> <p><i>Astute scripts will note that the intensity of Boon's and Mother's reactions come from complex sources and personal traumas that cannot be <u>easily resolved</u>.</i></p>	
<p>This passage is the <u>highly charged culmination</u> of the conflict between Boon and Mother, vividly demonstrating their uncharacteristically <u>open animosity</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This scene occurs after Boon has cut down Mother's tree. • The passage is the vivid <u>climax of an unavoidable conflict</u> that arises due to the vastly different significance that both Boon and Mother place on the tree: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For Boon, cutting down the tree represents his coming to terms with his abuse at his father's hands, something he "should have" done "years ago". (Line 10) ○ However, for Mother, the tree represented her abiding hope that her husband would return. • This passage is particularly vivid in showing us Mother's <u>visceral reaction</u> to what she perceives to be Boon's ultimate <u>betrayal</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ She accuses Boon of cutting down the tree because he is a "Heartless, money grubbing" person. (Line 2) ○ She calls him a "Bastard", suggesting that in her rage, she refuses to acknowledge Boon as her son. (Line 3) ○ He has 'murdered' her symbolic hope of seeing her husband alive again. (Line 9) • This moment is particularly vivid because of the <u>clamour</u> / <u>din</u> generated <u>onstage</u> by Mother throwing the statues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Furthermore, this symbolises Mother's <u>abject</u> despondency – she highly valued the statues because they remind her of significant moments in her life (Act 1 Scene 2), but which are no longer important to her after Boon's betrayal.

<p>Mother's extreme <u>desperation</u> vividly conveys the tension between parent and child and generates pathos and sympathy for her</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother reacts to the cutting down of the tree with <u>extreme desperation</u>. The tree represented a large part of the <u>impetus / reason</u> for her existence. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The repetition of “don’t” in lines 19 to 20 convey her increasing <u>despondency</u>. Through this repetition, Mother insists that she would rather reject human contact with “anybody” just so she could have “my house ... my tree” (line 20). • Through this scene, audiences are required to <u>confront</u> how Mother's feelings and personal history take <u>precedence</u> over logic and rationality: “I want to die here, with my tree. Why can't I die here?” (line 24 – 25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boon has hurt her at an existential level, vividly conveying the profound depths that parent-child conflict can reach – where one's loved ones inflict the most damage on oneself.
<p>The scene is vivid in portraying the tragic nature of parent-child conflict because of the hurt that <u>Mother inadvertently inflicts on Boon</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon, in turn, continues to be hurt by his Mother's rejection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The <u>tripling / repetition</u> of “gone” (line 27) and <u>doubling</u> of “nothing” (line 26) ○ There is a growing sense of <u>frustration and desperation</u> in Boon's pleading and questioning. He alternately <u>cajoles</u> (“Come on, Ma”, line 28) and <u>ridicules</u> her (“Is that stupid tree so much more important than me?”, line 28). • The <u>tension</u> here increases palpably, when audiences realise that Boon's intervention has not succeeded. Boon's attempts to reach out and find compromise with his mother have failed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The rift in their relationship is placed (literally) <u>centre stage</u> as both characters stand amongst the material detritus of their home life.
<p>This scene is particularly vivid because of the use of <u>humour</u> as part of its resolution, which conveys the at-times irrational nature of love and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon offers to Mother: “Fine. Then take it with you ... stuff it in your cupboard, under your bed” (line 30 – 31). The <u>exaggeration / hyperbole</u> suggests his resignation. • This ludicrous solution is, surprisingly the basis for a shared understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When Mother accepts his suggestion, Boon picks up the statue fragments and “<i>holds out a piece</i>” (line 39). ○ In this <u>tentative, almost apologetic</u> gesture, Boon indicates that he understands the <u>existential</u>

<p>human relationships</p>	<p>importance of the tree to Mother. He begins to understand that Mother will live life on her own terms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where Mother doubts Boon's amateur attempts to fix the statues with "Scotch tape" (line 44), a laughably <u>inadequate</u> solution to the carnage, Boon persists and shows his <u>sincerity</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It also recalls Boon returning to his childhood form of making amends by similarly scotch-taping statues he had broken in his youth (Act 1 Scene 2) ○ Mother's reply, "Wah... Jing pai kua leh" (line 48) has a great amount of comic potential, even as the moment represents a shared understanding and compromise between the two. ○ Boon remains on stage, "<i>picking up the pieces</i>" (line 51) as a <u>metaphor</u> for how he moves towards reconciling with, and making amends toward Mother.
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b (ii)	Explore one other moment in the play where Tay vividly conveys the tensions between parent and child.
<p><u>Setter's comments:</u> Other possible scenes include Act 1 Scene 7 (Persuasion – Mother and Son), Act 1 Scene 16 (Argument between Mother and Son) and Act 2 Scene 8 (Reunion).</p> <p>The two scenes below have been suggested for the way they bookend key developments in the <u>Plot</u>. Act 1 Scene 2 was chosen for the way it incorporates humour and childhood memory, while Act 2 Scene 12 was chosen because it represents a key point in <u>Character</u> development, where Mother reveals to Boon the sacrifices she has made for him.</p>	
Suggested Scene (1): Act 1 Scene 2	
Tay vividly conveys the tensions between parent and child by emphasising their <u>different perceptions of history</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this scene, Boon is advising Mother on how to make the flat presentable for potential buyers. • One point of tension is regarding Mother's statues, which Boon calls "hideous" and "Jing pai kua". Boon does not know their value and takes them lightly, as seen in his curt tone when he retorts "How I know". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mother's "whole shelf" stuffed with "tacky souvenir figurines" represent the memories she has accumulated over a lifetime. While they appear <u>dated / kitschy</u>, the audience realises that they represent key memories, including those of Mother's 1974 honeymoon. • Boon, however, is unable to appreciate the value of such <u>sentimentality</u>. He <u>sarcastically/ dismissively</u> asks, "Got anything from this century or not?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This humorous hyperbole underscores the <u>gulf</u> between Boon and Mother, because while the gap between the time of staging (2008) and the 1970s the statues were purchased in do not quite make up a century, Boon's reactions show how quickly and starkly generational attitudes have drastically shifted in the play's context.
Boon, on the other hand, values material aspirations in a way that Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conversation <u>shifts / segues</u> toward the things that Boon values, including an "amazing view of the sea". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While Boon takes it for granted, as a property agent, that everyone should treasure such a

<p><u>cannot understand</u></p>	<p>feature, Mother <u>idiosyncratically</u> insists that it “Makes me want to vomit”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother’s cluttered ground floor flat, as well as her gesture of making a “retching sound”, characterise her as someone comfortable with her own ways of existence.
<p>Tay also uses <u>childhood memories</u> to vividly show the differing values of Boon and Mother.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon appears to remember little from his childhood and views his misadventures as something to be left behind. For him, the “ugly stickers” on the wall should be removed as part of the <u>processes of renewal</u>, to make things presentable and saleable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mother wryly reminds him that “You put them there”, when Boon was six: “Who else?” For Mother, such <u>detritus</u> forms part of her cherished memories, of her child growing up. She takes delight in reminding Boon of his childhood fervour for Spiderman, Ultraman, Xiao Fei Xiang and Superman. ○ While these memories ostensibly embarrass Boon, including the one of him “jump jump jump from sofa to sofa”, they form a source of delight for his mother: “Cheo gao buah see”, laughing as she reminisces the antics of her only son. • The scene vividly portrays the tension between Mother and Boon through the injection of <u>humour</u>, where there are <u>hints</u> of a shared understanding (even as the humour is largely at Boon’s expense). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mother’s memories are both humorous and yet, understandably irritating for Boon, including when she fumbles with Kryptonite, calling it “Capi...Creepy...Capi”. ○ Boon <u>reluctantly</u> engages with Mother, <u>hesitantly</u> reminding her that the “green green” rock is, in fact, named Kryptonite.
<p>Tay vividly portrays the parent-child tension through the central</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement forms the central conflict of this play, between staying / going, renewal / remaining etc. • Mother cannot fathom Boon’s demands for renewal: “Cut down, throw away. You don’t touch my tree. Don’t touch my statues. Don’t touch my things”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The repetition of the <u>possessive</u> “my” emphasises that Mother is hurt at Boon’s

<p>conflict of moving</p>	<p>dismissal of the objects that comprise key parts of her personhood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Don’t touch” suggests that the items are arranged the way she wants them to be, and they should <u>remain in their place</u>, rather than being “moved” or taken “away”. ● Boon, on the other hand, fantasises about migration: running “far, far away”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The phrase connotes a fairytale setting, one where Boon’s dreams will be fulfilled and needs met. ○ A familiar joke to Singapore-based audiences would be the desire for a country “not so hot, with lots of snow”. One senses Boon’s desire to <u>live a life vastly different from his current one</u>, even if that involves relocating to a different time and space. ● Boon believes that the house should be used as a means to an end, while Mother sees the house as an emblem of her long-standing hope to reunite with her husband. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While Boon sees the 15-year wait for his father as evidence that his father is not going to return, Mother defiantly retorts “So?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For her, time is not a marker of decay in a relationship – unlike Boon which sees that old things must make way for the new.
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Suggested Scene (2): Act 2 Scene 12	
<p>Tay vividly portrays the tensions between parent and child by emphasising Mother's increasing <u>doggedness</u> / <u>obstinacy</u> / <u>stubbornness</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tay contrasts Boon's <u>acceptance</u> of the <u>majority's will</u> with Mother's readiness to adopt a <u>last stand</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boon emphasises the <u>weight</u> of the majority: "They've got the majority. That's all they need". He emphasises that this action is "legal" and that they are bound by <u>social obligation</u>. Hence, there is nothing they can do to resist the en-bloc sale. ○ In contrast, Mother seeks ways to <u>circumvent</u> this agreement she has been forced to partake in. She retorts that she "don't take their money lah" and will "tear up their cheque". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In this way, Mother refuses to play by the rules and <u>rejects</u> them because she deems them to be unfair to her. ○ Boon tries to emphasise the <u>physical</u> realities, even if Mother refuses to accept the <u>monetary</u> benefits: the property developers are "going to tear everything down". ○ Yet, for Mother, her <u>home represents an extension of her personhood</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mother threatens to physically block the developers: that they can "tear down around me ... can build around me". ▪ This is also a <u>metaphor</u>, where home represents her: her memories, her hopes and her sense of belonging. By refusing to move, Mother insists on the <u>inviolability</u> of her selfhood.
<p>Tay also vividly portrays parent-child conflict in the way Boon tries to <u>distance</u> himself from his parents and what he sees as <u>Mother's lack of perception</u> / <u>perspective</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon is <u>incensed</u> by Mother's comparison of him to his father: "Just like your father like that. Little bit problem also run away". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boon snaps back "Bullshit. Bullshit. I am not like that bastard at all." His intense emotional response hints at his <u>deep-rooted disgust</u> with his father. [Compare Act 2 Scene 2: "(brokenly) I am not like you. (<i>defiantly</i>) I won't be like you"] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Part of his hurt stems from the fact that Mother refuses to move in the hope that her husband will return, even as Boon believes that he "has been here. With

	<p>you...All these years..." supporting his Mother.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The emphasis on the "years" suggests that Boon at least partially blames Mother for blocking his progress in life. • Boon is increasingly <u>infuriated</u> by his perception that Mother lacks <u>perspective</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ His questioning tone in the lines beginning "Remember that night he left?" show his increasing agitation and disbelief at Mother's refusal to see her husband as the man Boon believes him to be: "How can you defend a monster like that?" ○ The parent-child conflict is vividly portrayed when Boon articulates his feelings about Mother: "When are you going to open your eyes, Ma?" This statement <u>encapsulates</u> Boon's attitude towards Mother, including, for instance, her inability to see the clutter in her flat. ○ The repetition of "You think" in an <u>accusatory, confrontational</u> tone conveys Boon's growing <u>contempt</u> for Mother.
<p>Tay's most vivid portrayal of parent-child conflict comes from Mother's <u>revelation / articulation of what she has sacrificed for Boon</u>, which shows the <u>often unarticulated / inarticulable complexities</u> of parent-child conflict.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother vividly reveals that she told her husband not to come back. She interjects after Boon's accusations that "he didn't even bother to come back. He never came back!" with the revelation that "Because I told him not to!" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mother reveals that she had sacrificed her marriage for Boon's sake because her husband had mistreated him. ○ She vividly recounts how she pleaded with her husband to take Boon down from the tree, but he would not "No matter how hard I begged or screamed or cried". Audiences <u>relive</u> the <u>turmoil</u> that Mother faced as she gradually realises that she <u>had to make a choice</u> between her husband and her son. ○ When she relates how "I told him to go. Get out of my house. And he did.", the end-stopped lines and short, compact sentences betray the <u>emotional toll that her act of sacrifice continues to take on her</u>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We understand the <u>full import / significance</u> of this sacrifice when we recall Young Father and Young Mother's <u>marital bliss</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In Act 1 Scene 8, for example, we are shown a glimpse of the <u>hope</u> for the future that Young Father and Young Mother shared, excited by the ownership of their new home. • For Boon, Mother has been an annoyance in her idiosyncratic, backward-looking ways. In this scene, we understand that her insistence on staying is her way of <u>both defending and protecting</u> her child, while <u>holding out hope</u> that she and her husband may one day reunite and reconcile. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While her insistence on staying in the flat hurts Boon, audiences are now fully aware that she had hurt her husband (and herself) by commanding him to leave. ○ Having <u>already given the parts of herself that she could to Boon</u>, Mother <u>has no choice but to hurt him</u> in retaining the small, increasingly slim chance that she <u>may one day find happiness for herself again</u>, where her husband returns "Because I'm still here". In this way, the parent-child relationship is characterised by love, hurt and sacrifice: <u>where these seemingly-contradictory aspects nonetheless often coexist</u>.
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