

## Grade 7 English Worksheet

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### Assessment Task: Poetry, comprehension and understanding of text

#### **Activity: Reading a poem and answering questions**

Read the following poem, then answer the questions.

#### **Black and White**

I was flatly five  
When Johanna ascended her throne  
In the kiadom of our backyard.  
Raised on bricks she banished  
The tokoloshe from my childhood 5  
And as I grew sleek-  
She grated and peeled her years away.

On 2cms of black and white she watched  
The gloss of “The Bold and the Beautiful”,  
Moroka Swallows flew through goalless Saturdays. 10  
She lined her cupboard with columns of print,  
Black and white news of a world beyond.  
Growing smaller in the flowered overall,  
She washed and folded her years away.

She held my tears in the cracks of her hands,  
She beamed my triumph thought the gaps in her grin,  
Hers was the voice that called me from play.  
Joanna.Johanna.I cannot spell your name.  
I don’t know where they buried your smile.  
But in the black and white backyard of my days, 20  
The tokoloshe cavorts unrestrained.

—Ruth Everson

#### ***Vocabulary:***

Kia/kya: A South African word for an African hut or for a servant’s quarters.

Tokoloshe: A South African word for a legendary evil spirit usually imagined to be in the form of a hairy, dwarfish man. An evil imp or goblin, active mainly at night.

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### Questions

1. Who is the author of this poem? [1]
2. How old was the poet when Johanna came to work for her family? [1]
3. Quote a phrase from the poem which tells us that the poet was a plump child. [1]
4. Explain the meaning of the phrase: "raised on bricks..." (line 4) [1]
5. a) Identify the figure of speech in the phrase: "When Johanna ascended her throne." (line 2) [1]
  - b) What does this image suggest about Johanna? [1]
6. "She grated and peeled her years away." (Line 7)  
"She washed and folded her years away." (line 14)  
In your own words, explain the tasks that Johanna performed. [1]
7. Why do you think the phrase: "her years away" is repeated? [1]
8. Why do you think Johanna is referred to as "growing smaller"? [1]
9. Quote three phrases which contrast the life of the poet to that of Johanna's. [3]
10. The phrase "black and white" occurs several times in the poem. Explain the meaning of the phrase as it is used in each of the following examples:
  - a) "on 25cms of black and white" (line 8)
  - b) "Black and white news" (line 12)
  - c) "the black and white backyard of my days" (line 20) [3]
11. Give one word from the poem which means the same as:
  - a) glowed with pride
  - b) chased away [2]
12. What does the tokoloshe represent in this poem? [1]
13. What does it mean when the poet states: "Johanna banished the tokoloshe"? [1]
14. How does the poet make the line "I cannot spell your name" (line 18) credible? [1]
15. What has happened to Johanna? [1]
16. What does the word "gloss" (line 9) tell you about "The Bold and the Beautiful"? [1]
17. a) Identify the figure of speech in the following phrase: "gaps in her grin"  
b) What does this phrase tell us about Johanna's appearance? [2]
18. Explain the meaning of line 21: "the tokoloshe cavorts unrestrained." [1]

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### Suggested Solutions

Question number	Possible marks	Solution
1	1	Ruth Everson
2	1	She was five years old.
3	1	"I was flatly five..."
4	1	Refers to the tradition among many domestic servants to raise their beds on bricks for storage or to be rid of the tokoloshe.
5	2	a) Metaphor b) She was in command of her work or the house wherein she worked/ she took her job seriously.
6	1	She cooked and did the laundry.
7	1	It conveys the message that her job was monotonous and she did the same tasks for many years.
8	1	Johanna did not grow smaller, but the poet rather grew taller, so it seemed that way.
9	3	The title – "Black and White". While the poet "grew sleek", Johanna grew smaller. "in the black and white backyard of my days..."
10	3	a) The television b) The print on a newspaper is black on white. c) The poet's life was separate from Johanna's, who stayed in the backyard.
11	2	a) beamed b) banished
12.	1	c) All that is evil / our fears of the unknown
13	1	d) Johanna consoled the poet when she needed it. She allayed her fears.
14	1	Two words next to each other, and their spelling is different to prove this point – Joanna/Johanna
15	1	She has died.
16.	1	It is a fictitious or make-believe kind of lifestyle that exists only on TV (according to Johanna).
17	2	a) Alliteration b) She had missing teeth.
18	1	The poet is not at peace with herself, as she has many unanswered questions about Johanna. She will never know the answers either, as Johanna has died. She feels regret.
	<b>[Total:25]</b>	

This poem lends itself to a possible discussion about life under apartheid.