**‘Pot’**

**Shamshad Khan**

**Summary**

* The speaker begins by addressing a fragile terracotta pot in a museum and says that only ‘half of the story’ (7) is known about its origins
* The speaker then asks to be told ‘the rest’ (10) of the story and imagines the different scenarios that might have resulted in the pot arriving in England
* The speaker reflects that the ‘someone’ (23) who formed the pot and took the time to carefully add decorations will be missing it
* Finally, the speaker expresses a desire to ‘shatter’ (37) the glass in which the pot is displayed and return it to where it was created

**Key Aspects of the Poem**

A Khan uses the pot as a **symbol** to represent the cultural identity and feelings of those who are part of a ‘diaspora’ (40).

B The decorations on the pot are intricate and the result of great care. For example, there is a ‘snake patterned’ (33) out the outside. This **imagery** is important because represents a personal connection to its creator and leads the reader to question the extent to which the museum has the right to assume ownership of it.

C The poem is written in **free verse**, which means that it does not have a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme. This has the effect of making the speaker’s **direct address** seem conversational and spontaneous. The form also reflects the fragmented or incomplete knowledge the speaker possesses about its ‘story’ (6).

**Key Feature: Repetition [AO2]**

Kahn **repeats** the word ‘pot’ (3) throughout the poem. This has the effect of sustaining a dialogue between the speaker and the pot itself, albeit one where the pot remains silent. This connection is important because it helps the speaker to reflect on their own feelings of dislocation. The **repetition** of ‘pot’ also helps to remind the reader that the object is far from generic or ordinary. Despite appearing ‘almost’ (5) like a typical English pot, it is very much a unique item and one that possesses a rich and complex history. The two final lines of the poem are a further example of repetition, but this time the word ‘pot’ (55, 56) is phrased as a question. Although no answer is forthcoming, the **tone** is light-hearted and playfully leaves open the possibility that the speaker might one day receive a reply.

**Key Context: The Poet [AO3]**

Shamshad Khan was born in Britain, but both her parents were born in Pakistan. Her poems provide a commentary on issues connected to identity and cultural heritage, as well migration and colonialism.

**Key Context: Museum Artifacts [AO3]**

The pot is based on a Nigerian pot currently displayed in the **Manchester Museum**. The dedication at the end of the poem, written by Khan, makes a political point about the **ethical** and **legal** issues involved with acquiring works of art that were created in different places around the world. Khan invites the reader to consider the extent to which items like the pot should be displayed if they were stolen in a ‘looters’ deal’ (13) or if they were quietly ‘slipped’ (21) onto a boat. Many artefacts were stolen or taken with the threat of violence during colonial times, so a further issue to consider is whether museums should be required to return items that were taken without consent or pay reparation costs.

**Key Quotation: ‘if I could shatter this glass’ [AO2]**

The speaker wants to ‘shatter’ (37) the glass case that surrounds the pot. ‘Shatter’ is a **verb** that means to break something suddenly or violently, so this **vocabulary choice** is significant because it conveys the speaker’s strength of feeling. However, the speaker understands that shattering the glass is not a possibility: the pot can be seen, but not touched or removed. In the lines that follow, the speaker imagines the ‘hot sun’ (50) shining down on the pot whilst ‘warm grain’ (52) is poured inside it. These evocative images **contrast** with the cold, lifeless environment of the museum and make a strong case for exactly where the pot should reside. Khan stated in an interview that she wanted to equate ‘the placing of the pot in a museum with the incarceration of prisoners without legal representation and without charge’, suggesting that the museum has no right to keep it or other items with a similar provenance.

**Revision Focus**

Look at the cluster as a whole and select the poems that explore ideas about **belonging** and **connection**. From this point, create a mind map or table that will help you to compare how these central themes are presented. You might want to start by recalling a range of short quotations. After you have done this, try to focus on how the poets have used language in the quotations and how their language choices help them to present their ideas. Remember to always consider the effects the words and poetic devices achieve. Undertaking this process thoroughly, and referring back to your notes where necessary, will help to develop your subject knowledge and put your in strong position to make meaningful links between the poems when you are required to write about them.