

# CBSE CLASS XI WORKSHEET

Poem: "A Photograph" by Shirley Toulson

English Core (Hornbill) - Class 11

Time Allowed: 45 Mins

Max Marks: 25 (with Solution)

## EXTRACT-BASED SOURCE MATERIAL

*The cardboard shows me how it was  
When the two girl cousins went paddling,  
Each one holding one of my mother's hands,  
And she the big girl — some twelve years or so.  
All three stood still to smile through their hair  
At the uncle with the camera. A sweet face,  
My mother's, that was before I was born.  
And the sea, which appears to have changed less,  
Washed their terribly transient feet.*

## SECTION A: EXTRACT-BASED QUESTIONS (OBJECTIVE & VSA) — [8 MARKS]

**Q1. What does the word 'cardboard' refer to in the poem, and why has the poet used this word?**

(1 Mark)

### MODEL SOLUTION:

The 'cardboard' refers to a very old photograph mounted on a stiff paper base. The poet uses this word to emphasize the fragile, inexpensive, and transient nature of physical human records in contrast to lasting living memories.

**Q2. Who is the 'big girl' mentioned in the lines, and how old was she at that time?**

(1 Mark)

### MODEL SOLUTION:

The 'big girl' refers to the poet's mother. She was around twelve years old at the time the beach photograph was taken.

**Q3. Identify the poetic device used in the phrase 'terribly transient feet'.**

(1 Mark)

- (a) Simile
- (b) Oxymoron
- (c) Alliteration and Transferred Epithet
- (d) Personification

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

(c) Alliteration and Transferred Epithet. Alliteration is present in the repetition of the /t/ sound, and Transferred Epithet is used because 'transient' describes the short-lived nature of human life rather than the physical feet themselves.

**Q4. Explain the contrast established by the poet between the 'sea' and the 'feet'.**

(2 Marks)

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

The poet contrasts the permanent, unchanging nature of the sea with the mortal, fleeting, and temporary nature of human life ('terribly transient feet'). While human life undergoes rapid changes and eventually ends, nature remains virtually unchanged over decades.

**Q5. Read the statements below and choose the correct option:**

(1 Mark)

**Assertion (A):** The cousins were smiling through their hair.

**Reason (R):** The wind on the beach was blowing their hair across their faces as they posed for the photograph.

- (a) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A.
- (b) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- (c) A is true but R is false.
- (d) A is false but R is true.

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

- (a) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A.

**Q6. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words based on your reading of the poem:**

(2 Marks)

The photograph captures a joyous \_\_\_\_\_ holiday where the mother's cousins, named \_\_\_\_\_ and Dolly, went wading into the water.

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

beach, Betty

**SECTION B: SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (30–40 WORDS) — [9 MARKS]**

**Q7. What did the mother's laugh indicate when she looked at the snapshot twenty to thirty years later?**

(3 Marks)

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

The mother's laughter indicated a deep sense of nostalgia and amusement. She was looking back at her carefree, happy childhood days and laughing at the old-fashioned beach outfits that her parents had dressed them in for the holiday.

**Q8. Explain the meaning of the line: 'Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.' Why is the phrase 'laboured ease' described as an oxymoron?** (3 Marks)

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

The line highlights how both the mother and daughter cope with their respective losses. The mother lost her innocent childhood; the daughter lost her mother's living presence and laugh. 'Laboured ease' is an oxymoron because it pairs two contradictory words: 'laboured' (requiring immense effort) and 'ease' (effortless). It reveals that accepting and moving on from a profound loss is a forced, painful effort disguised as a normal state of ease.

**Q9. What does the phrase 'its silence silences' mean? What is the 'circumstance' being spoken of?** (3 Marks)

**MODEL SOLUTION:**

The 'circumstance' refers to the painful reality of the mother's death. The phrase 'its silence silences' means that the absolute, irreversible silence of death leaves the poet completely speechless and consumed by grief. There are no words left to express or comfort such a profound loss.

**SECTION C: LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTION (100–120 WORDS) — [8 MARKS]**

**Q10. The three stanzas of the poem depict three distinct phases of time and human life. Detail these three phases and discuss how the poem explores the universal themes of change, mortality, and silent grief.** (8 Marks)

#### MODEL SOLUTION:

The poem beautifully maps human life across three chronological phases:

1. **The First Phase (Innocent Childhood):** Captured in the physical photograph, it portrays the poet's mother as a twelve-year-old girl enjoying a carefree beach holiday with her cousins, vibrant and full of unblemished joy.
2. **The Second Phase (Reflective Adulthood):** Occurs twenty to thirty years later, where the middle-aged mother smiles wistfully at the photograph, remembering her lost youth with bittersweet amusement.
3. **The Third Phase (Absolute Loss):** Represents the bleak present where the mother has been dead for nearly twelve years—the exact same age she was in the picture. The poet is left alone with a static image.

Through these shifting phases, Shirley Toulson delivers a poignant meditation on human mortality. By contrasting the transient, decaying nature of humans with the permanent, unchanging nature of the vast sea, the poem exposes our vulnerability to time. It ultimately illustrates that while memory provides a temporary, nostalgic bridge to the past, the finality of death leaves an overwhelming, silent void that cannot be filled.