



**The Night Mail**

This is the Night Mail crossing the Border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,

Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.

Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb:  
The gradient's against her, but she's on time.  
Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder,  
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,

Snorting noisily, she passes  
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.

Birds turn their heads as she approaches,  
Stare from bushes at her blank-faced coaches.

Sheep-dogs cannot turn her course;  
They slumber on with paws across.

In the farm she passes no one wakes,  
But a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

Dawn freshens. Her climb is done.  
Down towards Glasgow she descends,  
Towards the steam tugs yelping down a glade of cranes,  
Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces  
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen.  
All Scotland waits for her:  
In dark glens, beside pale-green lochs,  
Men long for news.

by W H Auden

Underline the correct answers.

- 1 Beattock is a (station, hill, shop).
- 2 Birds turn their heads (to see what is making the noise, because they like watching trains, because they have stiff necks).
- 3 'Blank-faced coaches' are (ones with no lights, ones painted black, ones with no curtains).

Answer these questions.

4-6 What three items are we told the train is carrying?

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7 Why do you think W H Auden describes the steam as 'over her shoulder' (line 8)?

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8 Give the meaning of the word 'descends' (line 18), as it is used in the poem.

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9 What image does the line 'Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen' (line 21) bring to mind?

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10 Which line in the poem is evidence that there is a farm close to the railway track?

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Underline the **root word** of each of these words.

11 pressure

12 detective

13 blacken

14 recovered

15 signature

16 freshly

17 swimming

18 unhelpful

Circle the word which is:

19 a **pronoun**

children

came

we

go

20 a **verb**

football

goal

play

boys

21 an **adjective**

dog

friend

him

sad

22 an **adverb**

speed

I

come

quickly

23 a **noun**

he

aunt

strong

enrage

24 a **pronoun**

there

though

through

it

25 a **verb**

teach

children

camera

dinner