



# TISSUE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



**Context** – *Tissue* was published in Imtiaz Dharker's *The Terrorist at my Table* collection in 2006.

**Imtiaz Dharker** – Imtiaz Dharker (born 1954) is a contemporary poet who was born in Pakistan and raised in Scotland. She has won the Queen's Gold Medal for her poetry. In her five poetry collections to date, she often deals with the search for meaning and identity, and the position of women and multiculturalism in contemporary society. Some of the other themes that she has covered include home, freedom, journeys, communal conflict and politics.



**Tissue** – The poem explores the power and fragility of tissue. Tissue can mean two things – 1. A very thin type of paper – There are a number of references to the real life uses that we have for paper, for example in maps, architects drawings, and receipts. Whilst paper is considered as an incredibly important resource in the poem, its fragility is also considered: 'tissue' can easily erode, become damaged. 2. Human tissue – our make-up, our skin. In this way, tissue is used as an extended metaphor for life.



**The Qur'an** – The Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a direct disclosure of truth from God (Allah). Muslims believe that the Qur'an was verbally communicated by Allah to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, slowly over 23 years. Muslims regard the book as the ultimate miracle of Muhammad. The Qur'an describes itself as a book of guidance for mankind. In many Islamic cultures, it forms the basis for the law.



**Impressionistic Poetry** – Impressionistic poetry relates to poems or aspects of poems that do not have a secure, single interpretation. Poets may make their meaning deliberately ambiguous to generate further discussion and thought about regarding potential meanings – thus drawing on the reader's own impressions and ideas to create meaning. Aspects of *Tissue* may be described as 'impressionistic.' As literature students, we should relate meaning to the stated topic (e.g. power and conflict).



## Language/Structural Devices

**Extended Metaphor**  
Dharker uses an extended metaphor throughout the poem, in comparing the life of mankind to tissue/ paper – both fragile and powerful at the same time. The physical frailties of paper are exposed in numerous places across the poem by Dharker, who expresses that it can 'fall away on a sigh/ a shift in the direction of the wind.' This is much the same as human life/ mankind, which can be easily eradicated by forces of nature. Paper, like human tissue, thins with 'age or touching', and can be altered by interactions (e.g. when it is 'smoothed', 'stroked'.) However, the power of mankind is also explained, mainly through the practical uses of paper stated in the poem (for example maps, receipts, the Qur'an) which are each related to important areas of life (travel, finances, religion). Dharker maintains despite more permanent 'capitals and monoliths' being built, the grand design of nature lay in our tissue – what we achieve in our lives 'never meant to last.'

**Quote:** "and never wish to build again with brick or block, but let the daylight break"

**Structure** – *Tissue* is constructed of largely unrhymed, quatrains, which reflects the irregularity of life and the flimsy nature of tissue paper. However, the quatrains themselves are fairly regular, perhaps representing the control of man. The final stanza is only one line long, which naturally draws the reader's attention to the main idea of the poem: that the tissue represents humankind.

**Quote:** "turned into your skin."

**Alliteration/Sibilance/Repetition** – A number of sounds and words are repeated. For example, in stanza 5 there is repetition of the 'm' sound (maps, marks, make, mountain) making the whole stanza a mouthful – this mirrors the complexity of life being described through the metaphor with maps. Furthermore, words, such as 'transparent' are repeated - emphasising their importance to Dharker's message (transparent can mean 'see through' but also 'honest').

**Quote:** "that rivers make, roads, railtracks, mountainfolds,"

**Similes** – Dharker uses a simile to compare our lives to paper kites. As this immediately follows details relating to how we use paper for transactions/ money, the most commonplace interpretation is that money can give us what feels like freedom (flying) but that we are still tied down by it (kite strings). Another interpretation is that our lives are at the mercy of greater forces, such as nature or the weather.

**Quote:** "and what was paid by credit card might fly our lives like paper kites."

**Enjambment** – Dharker uses enjambment across the poem in order for multiple purposes. Primarily, enjambment in the poem undermines the controlled order of the poem – this reflects the message: mankind's power is undermined by its fragility. Enjambment also leaves lines hanging on words and their meanings. For example, in the opening line, the reader is forced to consider the dual meaning of the word 'light.'

**Quote:** "Paper that lets the light/ shine through, this/ is what could alter things."

**Themes** – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

**The Power of Mankind** – Dharker makes references throughout the poem to the power of mankind through the extended metaphor with paper. The reader is shown that human life has the ability to 'let the light shine through', 'alter things', and 'trace a grand design.' Mankind is challenged to outlast even seemingly more permanent structures such as buildings.



**The Fragility of Mankind** – Throughout the poem, Dharker also expresses the fragility of life and mankind in general. Through the extended metaphor comparing life to 'tissue' (a particularly thin and flimsy type of paper), Dharker shows that mankind is weak and vulnerable in relation to nature and time.



## Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1-2	1	Paper that lets the light	<b>Stanza 1</b> – The extended metaphor between paper and life begins. The light shining through may represent the influence of God, for light is often used as a symbol of truth or representation of the divine. The poet suggests that this is what can make a positive difference ('could alter things'). As we age, skin becomes thinner, but we also gain wisdom. <b>Stanza 2</b> – The speaker continues the metaphor by suggesting that life, like the thinly worn pages of books, can be touched by others. The poem then begins to question whether we can outlive the paper records that we create.
	2	shine through, this	
	3	is what could alter things.	
	4	Paper thinned by age or touching,	
	5	the kind you find in well-used books,	
	6	the back of the Koran, where a hand	
	7	has written in the names and histories,	
	8	who was born to whom,	
3-4	9	the height and weight, who	<b>Stanza 3</b> – Reference is given to birth and death certificates, important moments in life that we formalise with paper. The extended metaphor is used again in 'smoothed', 'stroked', to show how lives are impacted by interactions with others – emotionally, physically and socially. This also exposes the fragility of human life; how it can be impacted by others. <b>Stanza 4</b> – The speaker then transgresses to a more speculative tone, considering what it would be like if buildings were made of paper – how they would quickly 'shift' and 'drift' – the question is raised in the mind of the reader whether human impact will outlive buildings.
	10	died where and how, on which sepia date,	
	11	pages smoothed and stroked and turned	
	12	transparent with attention.	
	13	If buildings were paper, I might	
	14	feel their drift, see how easily	
	15	they fall away on a sigh, a shift	
	16	in the direction of the wind.	
5-6	17	Maps too. The sun shines through	<b>Stanza 5</b> – The speaker gives a further example of a use of paper in everyday life – in the recording of maps. The extended metaphor persists here through the consideration of marks on the map (river, roads, etc.) and human marks (veins, scars, etc.) Sibilance of 's' helps to highlight the happier times in life. Maps are presented as delicate – subject to change depending upon the political conflicts and wars – just as the human skin can be impacted in life. <b>Stanza 6</b> – Another use for paper is receipts – this stanza demonstrates how our lives are ruled by money. Whilst money may make us feel free, the kite simile emphasises how it keeps us tied down – not actual freedom.
	18	their borderlines, the marks	
	19	that rivers make, roads,	
	20	railtracks, mountainfolds,	
	21	Fine slips from grocery shops	
	22	that say how much was sold	
	23	and what was paid by credit card	
	24	might fly our lives like paper kites.	
7-8	25	An architect could use all this,	<b>Stanza 7</b> – Another reference to practical uses of paper is provided in designs/architects drawings. The speaker expresses through this how paper has the potential to be more powerful than brick (links with creativity and ingenuity) and people's lives can be more powerful too. <b>Stanza 8</b> – The human construction is considered against the brick buildings. It is presented as a far more wonderful structure. Again the speaker returns to the religious idea of light shining through – 'grand design' suggesting that the perfect image of God is found in the living tissue of man.
	26	place layer over layer, luminous	
	27	script over numbers over line,	
	28	and never wish to build again with brick	
	29	or block, but let the daylight break	
	30	through capitals and monoliths,	
	31	through the shapes that pride can make,	
	32	find a way to trace a grand design	
9-10	33	with living tissue, raise a structure	<b>Stanza 9</b> – Human life is deemed to be far more fleeting than buildings of brick, which shows the fragility of mankind. Yet, it is also suggested that it has the potential to be far more powerful. The speaker once more shares that, like paper, lives are affected by those who touch them. <b>Stanza 10</b> – The personal pronoun 'your' addresses the readers directly. The line is set alone to emphasise the message. Whilst lives can be mapped out by tissue (paper) we should be encouraged to make something far more powerful (but less lasting) with our human tissue/ lives.
	34	never meant to last,	
	35	or paper smoothed and stroked	
	36	and thinned to be transparent,	
	37	turned into your skin.	

## Poems for Comparison

Poems for Comparison	Influences on the Poet
<b>London/ My Last Duchess</b>	<i>Tissue</i> can be compared and contrasted with these poems through its presentation of the power of mankind.
<b>Ozymandias/ The Prelude (Extract)</b>	<i>Tissue</i> can be compared and contrasted with these poems through its presentation of the fragility of mankind.
<p>"As a child, I wasn't exposed to much poetry. Of course, I knew Keats and others but there was no connection in my life. Gerard Manley Hopkins, as I said, was the first one to really connect with me. Now, I can't choose a favourite poet or poem. It changes every day – anything that knocks me out. It could be new poets like John Agard or Caroline Bird. Carol Ann Duffy's 'Prayer' is one – anything that's fresh and alive. In Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art' – although I don't usually like very structured forms – she uses the villanelle form (repeating the first and third lines) to convey loss so well. Interview with Young Poets Network at <a href="http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk">www.poetrysociety.org.uk</a></p>	

