

By the end of studying Belfast Confetti I need to know:

Summary: It is a poem of two stanzas. The persona is walking through the streets of Belfast during an outbreak of violence. He tries to avoid it but gets cornered.

Ideas: The persona feels that no-one can ever escape violence in Belfast as it is too caught up in the idea and actions of war. His choice of words and punctuation are symbolic of the violence in Belfast.

<p>Vocabulary</p>	<p>Riot squad - group of police officers who have special training and equipment to deal with riots. Fount - a spring of water/Origin of information Asterisk - * punctuation mark that denotes that something is missing or doubtful information. Hyphen - a short line used to connect divided words Rapid - fast Stuttering - a sound or word that is repeated in a broken rhythm. Saracen - army police van Labyrinth - a maze of streets or avenues Kremlin-2 mesh - protective mesh used on tanks for anti-rocket defence Makrolon face shields - riot shields to protect the face or full-length ones for the body Walkie-talkies - hand held radios that police used Fusillade - gunfire shot at the same time</p>
<p>Context (To inform interpretation)</p>	<p>The poet - Ciaran Carson was born into an Irish speaking family in Belfast. It is thought that his first name, Ciaran, is a Catholic name and that Carson is a protestant name. Most of his poems are written about the troubles in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The Troubles - 'The troubles' is used to describe the period of conflict in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1998. The conflict was over who Northern Ireland belonged to. The Unionists wanted to keep Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and the Republicans wanted Ireland to be completely united again. Whilst 'the troubles' were not primarily a religious conflict, it was very well known that the Republicans were mainly of Catholic faith and that the Unionists were protestant.</p> <p>Throughout 'the troubles' it was described as a 'low-level war'. This was because the nature of the conflict meant that people were able to go about their day-to-day business on the same day as a fight breaking out on the same streets that would involve home-made bombs. To this day, the city is still divided by 'peace-walls' in an attempt to keep the two communities apart. A political agreement and tense truce was signed in 1998 known as the Good Friday Agreement, which enabled the two sides to share political power and the UK government relinquishing some of its powers. However, it is still very fraught there and this has been exacerbated by Brexit.</p> <p>The setting - In Belfast, August 1969. Carson explains himself that the name of the poem, 'Belfast Confetti', was the name given to the collection of nuts, iron bits and bolts by men working in a shipyard that were preparing to riot. They would use the bits to 'throw some Belfast confetti' on the opposition.</p> <p>Prejudice against Catholics- Due to the nature of The Troubles, the British built a considerable distrust of the Irish community, particularly those who were Catholic. The poem itself is set in the Falls Road area of Belfast-Odessa Street, Crimea Street, Inkerman Street and Odessa Street (whilst also associated with the Crimean War) area also roads around Falls Road- a place synonymous with republican ideology. This may be the cause of the army's heavy-handed tactics: they distrust all Irish in this area.</p>
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Violence and Conflict - Here in the poem, this links to the way in which the civilians respond to the police during the riot - 'Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys.' We see how the conflict dehumanises the place where people live and work 'And the explosion' of a homemade bomb turns the area into an immediate war zone causing panic amongst people as they were 'raining down exclamation marks', which also shows that people are desperate to escape the riot. It should also be noted that the everyday items in the bomb are usually used to keep things together or working forward, yet in this instance they have been used to hurt or maim people, breaking the society apart and stopping it from working. Additionally, the city that the speaker normally knows so well, has been turned into a 'labyrinth' making it now unfamiliar and inescapable.</p>

Reading:

If read in a Belfast accent, it would add to the harsh tone of the poem. Ciaran Carson's reading of the poem is below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEI995TPKDW>

	<p>The names of the streets identified by the persona in the second stanza, whilst being named after a conflict from long ago, shows that war is a permanent feature in Belfast, but also the world as it is reference to the war between Britain and Russia. The violence has also totally disorientated the persona as he asks, 'Why can't I escape?'</p>
<p>Deeper understanding</p>	<p>Language: It is written in the first person. The semantic field of the poem is centred around war. It opens with the use of sibilance - 'Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks,' - giving the fast pace of the riot that is occurring. The poem is an extended metaphor where the poet compares the persona's experiences to the use of punctuation marks. The punctuation is very much used to create imagery for the reader. In the poem, Carson questions if language can really capture the level of violence experienced 'I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering'.</p> <p>Throughout the poem we see the how the language breaks down in the face of violence. The title is a juxtaposition, suggesting a celebration, yet local slang meaning the exact opposite. The persona compares the violent destruction of the bomb with punctuation marks—which are fundamental tools of language. 'Exclamation marks' are raining through the air—suggesting immediate danger—and gunfire is described as a 'hyphenated line.' All routes of escape are 'blocked with stops and colons.' Language and violence are thus presented as intimately linked, but notably, punctuation is meaningless without a clear context. Because the speaker presents these punctuation marks as chaotic and decontextualized, they seem to act as metaphors describing the way that language can't fully capture the horrors of violent conflict. Another interpretation is that the lines of communication between the two sides has broken down; language hasn't managed to stop the violence, and so we are left with the punctuation marks of violence as the way forward. Carson makes use of plosives in the poem to add to the imagery of the explosion and the violence - 'Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys.'</p> <p>Structure: The structure of the poem is two stanzas written in free verse. Carson referred to the poem as a 'skewed sonnet'. This structure mirrors the breakdown of the language, the society and of the persona himself. The lack of meter in the poem helps to further the image of the persona's experience of chaos and confusion in the reader's mind. The poem uses four rhetorical questions within the poem. The first, 'Why can't I escape?', literally reflects the persona's inability to get out of the conflict zone; the second interpretation is that the troubles never seem to end, even today the truce is lacking in true stability. Three are placed immediately after each other 'What is my name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?'. Initially, these could be the questions of the police who the persona appears to have come up against. However, they can also represent the state that Northern Ireland is in - where is it coming from and where is it going? - the war is not helping the identity of the community or country, leaving it even more fractured and divided.</p> <p>Psychological impact of the Troubles-It's clear in the poem that the persona is psychologically impacted by his experiences- relating how innocent people are impacted by the heavy-handed nature of the army. This is firstly evident through the enjambement of the lines and irregular stanzas; also reinforced through the shift between past and present tense between the first and second stanza. This could reflect one of two things- either that the second stanza is happening as the persona relates his experiences, or that he is retelling the story throughout the poem- however, by the second stanza his mind has placed himself back in that situation. He also asserts how he 'tried to complete a sentence in [his] head but it kept stuttering'- metaphorically suggesting the persona's inability to express his own thoughts. This is also reinforced through the semantic field of punctuation throughout the poem. The memory of the event is so psychologically challenging to him that he cannot fully recount events in a coherent way- replacing events with punctuation. His disorientation is expressed towards the end of the poem, he claims he 'knows this labyrinth so well', the oxymoron indicating that he knows these streets, they are his home, but that conflict has changed the streets into something unrecognisable. The persona also becomes increasingly panicked and confused through his inability to describe what is happening, merely able to list objects that he could see: 'Saracen, Kremlin 2 mesh, makrolon face shields'. The poem ends with a 'fusillade of question marks' signifying that he is being bombarded with a barrage of questions that he cannot answer because he is so panicked and confused. This also suggests that even though the conflict itself is temporary and short term the effects of this are long-lasting.</p> <p>British army exacerbating the situation- Carson's poem offers a criticism of the heavy-handed nature of the British army during the Troubles, spurred on by their prejudices towards the Catholic community. The poem opens in medias res: 'suddenly, as the riot squad moved in it was raining exclamation marks'- the adverb 'suddenly' depicting the speed and how unexpected the riot squad's appearance was. Interestingly, the fact that it starts 'raining exclamation marks' after the appearance of the riot squad highlights how the army are exacerbating the situation- their arrival is what increases the anger and violence [or panic]. This idea of the situation being exacerbated by the British army is reinforced through the panic of the persona, as evidence</p>

Links across the text:

Poppies- both personas struggle to articulate their feelings, resulting in them using semantic fields (of punctuation and sewin respectively) to describe strong emotions.

What Were They Like- Both poems criticise the heavy-handed nature of governments in responding to guerrilla warfare. They deal with the impact of this abuse of power on both innocent people and the environment around.

No Problem- Both poems hint at the long-term impacts of prejudice.

Exposure- Both personas become increasingly confused and incoherent; though for different reasons. In both cases, personas are passive and unable to fight back against the situation- in 'Exposure' this is because the weather is invincible, in 'Belfast Confetti' it is because of the overwhelming dominance of the British army.

War Photographer- Both poems explore the effect of conflict on place- though more permanent in 'War Photographer', whilst 'Belfast Confetti' is temporary. Equally, the psychological impact of conflict on innocent people is evident in both.

	above ('see psychological impact of the Troubles'). The depiction of the tanks and riot gear in order to capture the innocent persona, panicked and attempting to flee, reflects the over-the-top nature of the army.
Quotes and references	<p>'Belfast Confetti' - Slang used for everyday items to be made into a weapon through the use of homemade bombs. It is a slang term for nuts and bolts from the Belfast shipyards.</p> <p>'- an asterisk on the map' - The asterisk represents the explosion in Belfast.</p> <p>'I know this labyrinth so well' - Despite the personal knowledge that the persona has of the area, the use of the term 'labyrinth' shows that it has now become a mystical maze that he cannot escape.</p> <p>'Balaclava, Ragland, Inkerman and Odessa Street' - The 6 streets named are actual Belfast streets and are named after generals, battles and places from the Crimean War showing that Carson links the riot to the battle of a bigger war.</p> <p>'A fusillade of question-marks' - the bombardment of the questions that are being posed to him by the riot police like he may be in some way responsible or questionable, that he himself is posing about the situation and that is being posed by the wider community. No-one seems to have answers, only questions.</p>
Terminology	<p>Sibilance - to emphasise the rapidity of the situation. The speed of the chaos and explosion.</p> <p>Assonance - the repetition of the 'i' sound to break up the flow of the lines to show the way the violence breaks up the persona's thoughts.</p> <p>Allusion - the reference to the labyrinth links back to the Greek maze of the Minotaur - to prevent him from escaping.</p> <p>Caesura - Used throughout the poem to emphasise the chaos and interruption that the violence is causing.</p> <p>Enjambment - its use is awkward in the poem in lines 2 and 3, and demonstrates a 'mini explosion' of the line symbolising the destruction caused by the actual explosion.</p> <p>Extended metaphor - used throughout the poem.</p> <p>Rhetorical questions - as explained above.</p>