COUNCIL FOR THE INDIAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

# ISC CLASS 12 ENGLISH LITERATURE ECHOES & REVERIE ANTHOLOGY GUIDE

Official Prescribed ISC Class 12 Board Exam Syllabus: Comprehensive Analyses of Prescribed Short Stories & Poems, Motifs, Thematic Frameworks & Solved RTC Questions

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| **Board:** CISCE (ISC Class 12 Board Examination) | **Paper:** English Paper 2 (Literature in English) |
| **Anthologies:** Echoes (Stories 6–10) & Reverie (Poems 6–10) | **Target Session:** ISC Board Exam 2026 |

## PART I: ECHOES — PRESCRIBED SHORT STORIES (ISC CLASS 12)

### 1. The Singing Lesson — Katherine Mansfield

**Narrative Core:** Miss Meadows, a music teacher, is shattered by a heartless letter from her fiancé Basil declaring he cannot marry her because he 'loves no woman'. Her internal anguish colors her entire classroom demeanour; she forces her innocent schoolgirls to sing a mournful dirge ('A Lament') with icy harshness. Suddenly, she is summoned to receive a telegram from Basil begging forgiveness for his momentary madness. Transformed by radiant joy, Miss Meadows returns to class, selecting a vibrant, triumphant spring hymn with passionate gusto.
**Core Theme:** The fragility of female emotional equilibrium; subjectivity of human perception governed by love and rejection.

### 2. The Sound-Machine — Roald Dahl

**Narrative Core:** Klausner invents a sensitive acoustic machine capable of capturing high-frequency sounds beyond human hearing. When he cuts a rose in his garden, the earphones convey a piercing, shriek of pain. Horrified, he strikes a large beech tree with an axe; the machine transmits an agonizing, deep subterranean groan. When he summons Dr. Scott to verify his discovery, a massive falling bough smashes the machine. Klausner, traumatized by the suffering of living plants, commands the doctor to paint iodine onto the tree's wound.
**Core Theme:** Scientific obsession versus ecological empathy; unseen sentience and suffering in nature.

### 3. B. Wordsworth — V.S. Naipaul

**Narrative Core:** Set in Port of Spain, Trinidad. A young boy befriends B. Wordsworth, a gentle, eccentric, impoverished beggar-poet who claims to be the brother of William Wordsworth and is writing 'the greatest poem on earth' at the rate of one line per month. He teaches the boy to look at mango trees, stars, and quiet rivers with poet's eyes. On his deathbed, Wordsworth lies that the poem and his poet's identity were mere fiction, choosing to free the boy from tragic artistic burdens.
**Core Theme:** The sanctity of the poet's vision; colonial isolation; sacrifice for a young disciple's innocent future.

### 4. A Telephone Call — Dorothy Parker

**Narrative Core:** A gripping stream-of-consciousness monologue of a desperate woman waiting beside a silent telephone for her lover to call at five o'clock. She barters with God, promises humility, swings between explosive anger, neurotic counting, and humiliating rationalizations for his silence. Parker masterfully exposes the agony of female emotional dependency in an unbalanced romantic relationship.
**Core Theme:** Neurotic obsession, modern alienation, psychological torment of passive waiting.

### 5. The Chinese Statue — Jeffrey Archer

**Narrative Core:** Sir Alexander Heathcote, a fastidious British diplomat in Peking, purchases a delicate Ming dynasty porcelain figurine of the Emperor Kung from a craftsman for an exorbitant price. Preserved as a priceless family heirloom across generations, Alexander's impoverished great-grandson takes it to Sotheby's for auction to clear family debts. The auctioneer reveals that the porcelain statue is a clever 19th-century fake worth merely fifty pounds, but the handcrafted wooden base given freely by the craftsman is an authentic Ming masterpiece that fetches twenty-eight thousand guineas.
**Core Theme:** Dramatic irony, appearances versus reality, twists of fate and artistic patronage.

## PART II: REVERIE — PRESCRIBED POEMS (ISC CLASS 12)

### 1. The Darkling Thrush — Thomas Hardy

**Fin-de-Siècle Meditation:** Written on New Year's Eve 1900, Hardy stands leant upon a coppice gate overlooking a bleak, desolate winter landscape that mirrors the dying 19th century. Suddenly, an aged, frail, gaunt thrush bursts into an ecstatic, joyful evening song amidst the bleak gloom. The speaker reflects that the bird perceives some blessed Hope of which the human poet remains completely unaware.

### 2. Birches — Robert Frost

**Pastoral Philosophy:** Frost watches birch trees bent low by ice storms, but prefers to imagine a young country boy swinging from the top branches, subduing his father's trees one by one. The act of swinging up toward heaven and returning safely to earth becomes a metaphor for poetic imagination and life itself: 'Earth's the right place for love: / I don't know where it's likely to go better.'

### 3. Crossing the Bar — Alfred, Lord Tennyson

**Serene Farewell:** Written shortly before his death, Tennyson contemplates crossing the harbor sandbar into the infinite sea as an allegory for dying. He wishes for no mournful farewells, no groaning of the bar, only a tide so deep that it seems asleep. He expresses serene faith that upon crossing into eternity, he will meet his Divine Pilot face to face.

### 4. Dover Beach — Matthew Arnold

**Victorian Crisis of Faith:** Gazing across the English Channel toward the French coast, Arnold hears the eternal melancholic ebb and flow of pebbles driven by waves. He laments that the 'Sea of Faith', once full across the world, is now retreating with a long, melancholy roar. In an uncertain world lacking certitude and peace, the only sanctuary left is mutual human fidelity: 'Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!'

### 5. We are the Music Makers — Arthur O'Shaughnessy

**Ode to the Artist:** An impassioned celebration of poets, artists, and visionaries. Though wandering by desolate streams and sitting alone in society's margins, music makers and dreamers are the true architects of civilization: they build nineveh with sighing, conquer world empires with rhyme, and shape humanity's spiritual destiny across generations.