COUNCIL FOR THE INDIAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS (CISCE)

TREASURE CHEST

POEMS & SHORT STORIES • ICSE CLASS 9 COMPANION

Complete Study Guide: Detailed Plot Synopses • Character Analyses • Thematic Explanations
Stanza Paraphrases • Literary Devices • Solved Reference-to-Context (RTC) Questions

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Prose 2	**Oliver Asks for More**	Charles Dickens	Victorian Poverty, Child Exploitation
Prose 3	**The Model Millionaire**	Oscar Wilde	True Generosity, Inner vs Outer Wealth
Prose 4	**The Home-coming**	Rabindranath Tagore	Adolescent Alienation, Yearning for Love
Prose 5	**The Boy Who Broke the Bank**	Ruskin Bond	Rumours, Mass Hysteria, Small-Town Irony
Poem 1	**The Night Mail**	W.H. Auden	Human Connection, Rhythm, Industry
Poem 2	**Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat**	T.S. Eliot	Order, Duty, Vigilance, Humour
Poem 3	**I Remember, I Remember**	Thomas Hood	Childhood Innocence vs Adult Melancholy
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Poem 5	**A Work of Artifice**	Marge Piercy	Patriarchal Conditioning, Stunted Growth

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SECTION I: PRESCRIBED SHORT STORIES

1. Bonku Babu’s Friend — Satyajit Ray

Author Context: Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), one of India's greatest filmmakers, writers, and illustrators, pioneered Bengali science fiction through stories of human empathy and scientific wonder.
Detailed Plot Summary: Bonkubihari Datta (Bonku Babu) is a meek, underpaid geography and Bengali teacher at Kankurgachhi Primary School. For twenty-two years, he has patiently endured the insults and mocking pranks of both his naughty students and the snobbish village elite who gather at Sreepati Majumdar’s evening adda. He stays quiet only because he loves teaching and cannot afford to lose his livelihood. One evening, after the men jeer at his quiet belief in extraterrestrial life, Bonku walks home through Poncha Ghosh’s bamboo grove. There, he encounters a glowing, translucent spherical spacecraft. An alien named Ang emerges from the craft. Ang is three and a half feet tall, hairless, with large yellow eyes and limbs like noodles. Ang reveals he comes from planet Craneus and possesses miraculous technological gadgets that let him view any part of the universe. Ang observes Bonku’s submissive demeanor and rebukes him: 'You are a good man, but you must learn to defend your dignity.' Empowered by Ang’s respect and validation, Bonku arrives at Sreepati Majumdar's gathering the next evening. He boldly insults each arrogant member in turn, spills tea over Majumdar's lap, and leaves with head held high—a free, self-respecting man.

Key Characters:
• **Bonku Babu:** Gentle, soft-spoken, deeply intellectual yet socially passive until transformed by extraterrestrial friendship.
• **Ang:** The advanced, compassionate alien from Craneus who respects human curiosity and teaches Bonku the sanctity of self-worth.
• **Sreepati Majumdar:** The affluent, condescending leader of the village adda who thrives on belittling Bonku.

Solved ICSE Reference-to-Context (RTC) Question:
'You are a good man, Bonkubihari Babu. But you have a terrible fault: you are too meek. You must learn to speak up.'
(i) Who is the speaker and where does this conversation take place?
Ans: *The speaker is Ang, an alien explorer from planet Craneus. The conversation takes place in Poncha Ghosh’s bamboo grove in the village of Kankurgachhi.*
(ii) How did the speaker arrive there? What was remarkable about his vessel?
Ans: *Ang arrived in a spherical spacecraft made of a glass-like translucent material that glowed with a warm, pulsating pinkish light.*
(iii) What impact did the speaker's advice have on Bonku Babu's personality?
Ans: *It awakened Bonku's latent self-respect. The following evening, he fearlessly stood up to Sreepati Majumdar and his cronies, demanding the dignity he deserved.*

2. Oliver Asks for More — Charles Dickens

Historical Context: Charles Dickens exposes the brutal dehumanization of the English Poor Law of 1834, which treated poverty as a crime and incarcerated orphans in squalid, starvation-ridden workhouses.
Detailed Plot Summary: Oliver Twist is born into a parish workhouse where his mother dies immediately in childbirth. Raised under the harsh neglect of Mrs. Mann, Oliver is returned at age nine to the main workhouse where the wealthy board of guardians decides to feed the boys only three bowls of thin water-gruel a day. Slowly driven desperate by agonizing hunger, the starving boys hold a council and cast lots; the lot falls on Oliver to walk up to the master after dinner and request a second portion. Trembling with fear yet compelled by extreme hunger, Oliver approaches the master with his bowl and spoon: *'Please, sir, I want some more.'* The master turns pale and strikes Oliver with his ladle. The pompous beadle Mr. Bumble rushes to inform the astounded board. In horrified outrage, the gentlemen brand Oliver as a hardened criminal headed for the gallows. Oliver is instantly confined to a cold dark room, and a notice is nailed to the gate offering five pounds to anyone willing to take him off the parish's hands.

Solved RTC Question:

'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

(i) Why did the gentleman make this prediction about Oliver?

Ans: *Because Oliver had committed what the board considered an unpardonable act of rebellion: he had asked for a second serving of gruel.*

(ii) What satirical portrait of the workhouse authorities does Dickens convey?

Ans: *Dickens portrays the board as heartless, hypocritical gluttons who preach Christian charity while starving defenseless orphans.*

3. The Model Millionaire — Oscar Wilde

Thematic Context: Oscar Wilde delights in subverting social conventions, demonstrating that genuine compassionate impulse transcends calculated worldly intellect.
Detailed Plot Summary: Hughie Erskine is a remarkably handsome, charming, and kind-hearted young man who unfortunately lacks commercial acumen and has failed at every profession. He is deeply in love with Laura Merton, but her stern father, a retired colonel, refuses to sanction their marriage until Hughie amasses ten thousand pounds of his own. One morning, Hughie visits his artist friend Alan Trevor, who is painting a life-size portrait of a ragged, miserable beggar. Moved by the beggar's pitiful appearance, Hughie impulsively presses his last sovereign (a gold pound coin) into the beggar's palm before leaving. Unknown to Hughie, the beggar model is actually Baron Hausberg, one of the wealthiest financiers in Europe, who commissioned Trevor to paint him as a beggar. Overjoyed by Hughie's genuine kindness, the Baron sends him a sealed envelope on the wedding eve containing a cheque for £10,000, enabling Hughie and Laura to marry happily.

Solved RTC Question:
'Millionaire models,' remarked Alan, 'are rare enough; but, by Jove, model millionaires are rarer still!'
(i) Explain the play on words between 'millionaire models' and 'model millionaires'.
Ans: *A 'millionaire model' refers to a rich man posing as an art model (Baron Hausberg posing for Trevor). A 'model millionaire' refers to an exemplary, benevolent wealthy person who uses his riches to reward genuine human goodness.*

4. The Home-coming — Rabindranath Tagore

Thematic Context: Tagore provides an unforgettable psychological study of adolescent longing for unconditional acceptance and the profound loneliness of an uprooted rural youth.
Detailed Plot Summary: Fourteen-year-old Phatik Chakravorti is the spirited ringleader of boys in a riverine Bengal village. Constantly clashing with his spoilt younger brother Makhan and misunderstood by his short-tempered widowed mother, Phatik is overjoyed when his maternal uncle Bishwamber offers to take him to Calcutta for schooling. However, in Calcutta, Phatik finds himself despised as an unwanted burden by his haughty aunt and mocked as an awkward rustic dunce by his cousins. He suffocates in the brick maze of the metropolis, aching for his beloved village river and green fields. When he falls desperately ill with malaria, he runs away in delirium, is brought back drenched by the police, and on his deathbed deliriously murmurs that his holidays have come as his mother weeping arrives too late.

Solved RTC Question:
'Mother,' he cried out, 'the holidays have come.'
(i) When does the protagonist speak these words? What do 'the holidays' symbolize?
Ans: *Phatik whispers these dying words on his deathbed in Calcutta. 'The holidays' symbolize his ultimate release from emotional neglect, hostility, and suffering—a permanent homecoming into peaceful eternity.*

5. The Boy Who Broke the Bank — Ruskin Bond

Thematic Context: Ruskin Bond captures the volatile nature of gossip and crowd psychology in small-town India with sharp wit and comic irony.
Detailed Plot Summary: Nathu, an unpaid sweeper-boy at the Pipalnagar Bank, grumbles to the washerman's son Sitaram about his delayed wages of two rupees a month. Sitaram innocently mentions to Mrs. Srivastava that the bank has trouble paying its staff. Through a whirlwind of bazaar gossip—from Mrs. Srivastava to Mrs. Bhushan, to a merchant, a barber, and an elderly beggar—the minor complaint mushrooms into a full-scale panic that Seth Govind Ram has embezzled funds and fled the country. By noon, frantic depositors besiege the bank, demanding their deposits. The manager is helpless, and the angry crowd vandalizes the building. The next morning, Nathu arrives with his broom, swept away by the shattered glass, completely unaware that his own grumble brought down the financial institution.

SECTION II: PRESCRIBED POETRY

1. The Night Mail — W.H. Auden

Poetic Form & Meter: Written for a 1936 documentary film, Auden mimics the accelerating and decelerating chug of the postal locomotive carrying mail across the Scottish border.
Stanza-by-Stanza Meaning: The train crosses the border, climbing steady gradients through barren moorland while birds watch from the grass. It carries millions of letters—letters of thanks, financial receipts, love letters, and news of grief—connecting every stratum of Scottish and British life. Glasgow dreams of morning while the faithful machine delivers communication before sunrise.
Poetic Devices: Onomatopoeia (mimicking train sounds), Rhyme, Personification ('snorting noisily'), Alliteration ('gradient's against her, but she's on time').

Solved RTC:
'Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.'
(i) What democratic role does the postal train play?
Ans: *It serves as an impartial social equalizer, delivering communications equally to the wealthy and the destitute, tying society together.*

2. Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat — T.S. Eliot

Context & Whimsy: From *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Eliot celebrates an industrious brown-and-tabby cat who acts as the unofficial supreme supervisor of the Night Mail train.
Thematic Core: The train cannot depart without Skimble's approving signal. He inspects every third and first-class carriage, comforts passengers, and ensures not a single mouse disturbs their slumber. It is an ode to dedicated, quiet civil stewardship.

3. I Remember, I Remember — Thomas Hood

Context & Nostalgia: Thomas Hood contrasts the effortless, sunlit joy of childhood with the weary disillusionment of adulthood.
Stanza Structure: The poet recalls the window where the sun peered in, the roses and lilies planted by his brother, the high swing that brushed the wind, and the fir trees whose slender tops seemed to touch heaven. In adulthood, he laments that knowing he is further from heaven than when he was a boy brings profound spiritual sorrow.

4. A Doctor’s Journal Entry for August 6, 1945 — Vikram Seth

Historical Tragedy: Based on Dr. Michihiko Hachiya’s real Hiroshima diary, Seth uses restrained, matter-of-fact free verse to convey the unthinkable horror of nuclear holocaust.
Key Imagery: The sudden blinding flare of light, garments shredded from bodies, burnt skin hanging in ribbons, silence of shellshocked survivors, and the doctor's helpless realization of unprecedented cosmic devastation.

5. A Work of Artifice — Marge Piercy

Feminist Allegory: Piercy uses the Japanese bonsai tree—a plant that could naturally grow eighty feet tall on mountains but is pruned to nine inches in an ornamental pot—as a biting metaphor for how patriarchal society deliberately stunts female autonomy and ambition under the deceptive guise of protection and domestic elegance.