**ENG1DB Poetry Analysis Unit: Our Study of Lyric Poetry Continued…**



**Common Magic**

**By Bronwen Wallace** (A Canadian poet educated at Queen’s University)

Your best friend falls in love

And her brain turns to water.

You can watch her lips move,

Making the customary sounds,

But you can see they’re merely

Words, flimsy as bubbles rising

From some golden sea where she

Swims sleek and exotic as a mermaid.

It’s always like that.

You stop for lunch in a crowded

Restaurant and the waitress floats

Towards you. You can tell she doesn’t care

Whether you have the baked or french-fried

And you wonder if your voice comes

In bubbles too.

It’s not just women either. Or love

For that matter. The old man

Across from you on the bus holds

A young child on his knee; he is singing

To her and his voice is a small boy

Turning somersaults in the green

Country of his blood.

It’s only when the driver calls his stop

That he emerges into this puzzle

Of brick and tiny hedges. Only then

You notice his shaking hands, his need

Of the child to guide him home.

All over the city

You move in your own seasons

Through the seasons of others: old women, faces

Clawed by weather you can’t feel

Clack dry tongues at passersby

While adolescents seethe

In their glassy atmospheres of anger.

In parks, the children

Are alien life-forms, rooted

In the galaxies they’ve grown through

To get here. Their games weave

The interface and their laughter

Tickles that part of your brain where smells

Are hidden and the nuzzling textures of things.

It’s a wonder that anything gets done

At all: a mechanic flails

At the muffler of your car

Through whatever storm he’s trapped inside

And the mailman stares at numbers

From the haze of a distant summer.

Yet somehow letters arrive and buses

Remember their routes. Banks balance.

Mangoes ripen on the supermarket shelves.

Everyone manages. You gulp the thin air

Of this planet as if it were the only

One you knew. Even the earth you’re

Standing on seems solid enough.

It’s always the chance word, unthinking

Gesture that unlocks the face before you.

Reveals the intricate countries

Deep within the eyes. The hidden

Lives, like sudden miracles,

That breathe there.

**Poetry Analysis Questions:**

* Answer **all** of the poetry analysis questions in **complete sentences** on a **separate** sheet of **lined** paper.
1. The title of this poem is an **oxymoron**. Based on your reading of the poem, thoughtfully explain how magic can be “common”, and therefore why there is truth behind this contradictory idea?
2. Each of the first three stanzas of this poem is a **character sketch** of someone who is transformed by the powers of “common magic.” Describe each character, and describe the “common magic” that transforms each of them (use direct quotations from the poem to support your observations).
3. What important **literary device** is used in the lines: “All over the city/you move in your own seasons/through the seasons of others”? What does message does this device help the speaker to convey about society? Respond insightfully.
4. What is the **purpose** and **effect** of the speaker referring to children as “alien life-forms”? How does this **metaphor** contrast with other images created within the poem, and why is this contrast significant?
5. This poem **concludes** with the lines: “It’s always the chance word, unthinking/Gesture that unlocks the face before you./Reveals the intricate countries/Deep within the eyes. The hidden/Lives, like sudden miracles,/That breathe there.” These final lines express the controlling idea/theme of the poem. What is the **theme** of this lyric poem (express this controlling idea in **more than one** word)?