Background notes on poet:
Fazel Johennesse (1954 –) is a South African poet. He wrote most of his poetry during the 1970s and early 1980s. He and the poet Chris van Wyk started a Black Consciousness (a movement that promoted an awareness of the dignity and rights of black people, started by Steve Biko) literary magazine, Witte, which gave a voice to young aspirant black writers. However, the magazine was short-lived, as it was banned by the apartheid government.

Theme
➢ The horror that awaited young protesters on June 16th. It is told from the perspective of the young man who could possibly die in the violence that ensued on that day.
➢ It is also a scathing comment on the apartheid regime.

Tone
It can be seen as an elegy, because of its sad, mournful tone.
It also has the characteristics of a lyric as it expresses the poet’s feelings.
melancholy
longing
acceptance

Analysis

Line 1:
- The student looks to tomorrow; the day of the protest. ‘i’ suggests the student’s insignificance in the perspective of improving education for all non-white school goers and his acceptance of the sacrifice he will make to achieve this.
- That the student will ‘travel on a road’ suggests the well-known metaphor of life being a journey.

Line 2:
- The student’s journey in life is full of difficulty, as suggested by ‘winds’ and ‘hill’.
- It also suggests the student’s determination as persistence is needed to navigate a winding, uphill road.
- The student’s life is aimed at achieving a specific goal or summative achievement, in this case the improvement of non-white education.

Line 3 – 4:
- The student takes only his memories on the winding road for comfort.
- The memories are clearly important to the speaker which emphasises the importance of the human aspects of the protest rather than the political.

Line 5:
- The student realises the heartache and grief his death will bring to his mother.

Line 6:
- The student longs for a time when his life was simpler, and for the social presence of his friends. This shows the student to possess strong interpersonal bonds.

Line 7:
- The student recollects a simple instance with friends.
- This further emphasises that the student is merely a normal young man.

Line 8:
- In remembrance the student asks only that he be mourned with a song.
- This may suggest that he wishes his friends and family not to grieve for long over his passing.
The women who is to sing for him (assumedly his mother) has downturned eyes.
This could either be seen as a way to hide her grief or as a sign of submission to the oppressor (the apartheid government).

The student would also have an old man (assumedly his father) to grieve by means of the song.

The man has a ‘broken brow’. This may suggest physical scarring but may also suggest that it is furrowed from emotion.
This may be from the grief of the student’s death or from the years of oppression suffered under apartheid.

The student asks others to sing for him which may suggest that he is already dead, as he cannot sing for himself.

The student describes the end of his life (‘sunset’) as red. Red has connotations of anger, passion, blood and violence, all of which detail the occurrences during the protest.
‘Drenched’ suggests his complete hopelessness of escape from the violence and bloodshed. It also adds to the image of blood and suggests a large number of death.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>belch:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strummed:</td>
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<tr>
<td>drenched:</td>
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Questions:

1. Identify three things that the poet knows he will have to give up once he embarks on his journey of protest. (3)
   
   His secure life with his mother, his Friday night hangouts with his friends, most likely his life- "...my sunset is drenched with red"

2. Match the lines in the table below with their literary characteristics: Make sure that you can quote the figure of speech/half-rhyme) (5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line(s)</th>
<th>Literary characteristic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line 7</td>
<td>Enjambment (lines 3-4)</td>
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<td>Lines 3-4</td>
<td>Euphemism (line 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Line 13</td>
<td>Alliteration (line 7)</td>
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3. Discuss the context in which this poem was written.

It was written against the background of the Soweto uprisings amongst the youth about Afrikaans education as the main language of education. June the 16th 1976.

4. What is the meaning of the last two lines of the poem?

“o” i s an interjection/exclamation emphasizes the speaker’s grief. Line 13-It is not a gentle death but one which is “drenched with red”. The life of many young people has been ripped apart by police bullets and their blood flows freely, drenching the sunset (and streets) with blood.

5. Choose the answer that you think best sums up the main message of this poem from the options below:

(a) The poem concentrates on the human aspects of this young freedom fighter, rather than his political intentions.

(b) The poem expresses the anger that people felt about the inferiority of their education.

(c) The poem expresses a longing for home and family life.
Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali is a South African poet and teacher. His first volume of poetry *Sounds of a cowhide drum*, sold more copies than any other book of South African poetry when it was published in 1970. His poems explore the devastating effects of poverty.

Faces furrowed and wet with sweat,  
Bags tied to their wasp waists,  
women reapers bend mielie stalks,  
break cobs in rustling sheaths,  
toss them in the bags  
and move through row upon row of maize.  

Behind them, like a desert tanker,  
a dust-raising tractor  
pulls a trailer,  
driven by a pipe-puffing man  
flashing tobacco-stained teeth  
as yellow as the harvested grain.  

He stops to pick up bags loaded by thick-limbed labourers  
In vests baked  
brown with dust.  

The sun lashes  
the workers with a red-hot rod;  
they stop for a while  
to wipe a brine-bathed  
brow  
and drink from battered cans  
bubbling with malty “maheu”  

Thirst is slaked in seconds,  
Men jerk bags like feather cushions  
And women become prancing wild mares;  
soon the day’s work will be done  
and the reapers will rest in their kraals.

**Title**

- The title is descriptive of what the poem is about – reapers in a mieliefield
Theme

➢ In this poem the poet points out the harsh conditions under which many labourers work. He faithfully records the suffering of the workers as he evokes the tedium, the sweat and exhaustion of this kind of manual labour.

Analysis

Line 1:

➢ ‘Faces furrowed’
  - Alliteration
  - This is a negative image that suggests deep concentration and hard work is taking place.
  - ‘furrowed’ → wrinkled

➢ ‘wet with sweat’
  - Assonance → the repetition of the ‘e’ sound which aids the internal rhyme of the poem and also emphasizes how hard the labourers are working.

Line 2:

➢ ‘Bags tied to their wasp waists’
  - The bags are for the collection of the produce.
  - ‘wasp waists’ refers to the fact that the reapers are women and could also possibly imply that they are underfed → this speaks to the horrible conditions under which they work and the poor treatment that they receive.
  - ‘wasp waists’ → alliteration that emphasizes their large posteriors → also implies a reference to their femininity
  - Big posteriors resemble the belly of a wasp → wasps have stingers → the workers have the ability to eventually rebel → sting/revolt against their work conditions.

Lines 3 - 6:

➢ The speaker mentions that the labourers are women.
➢ They are doing a very laborious job under very hot and difficult conditions.
➢ One can also assume that they are poorly paid.
➢ Their practised action of picking mielies is described → a sense of monoton is created by this description.
➢ Line 6 emphasizes the idea of monoton → ‘row upon row’

Lines 7 – 9:

➢ Line 7 - 8 → simile ‘like a desert tanker’
  - The tractor blows up dust → ties in with the idea of the desert tanker

Lines 10 – 12:

➢ Possibly refers to the farmer → he is in charge and drives the tractor while the labourers do all the hard work.
He has a ‘comfortable seat’ and puffs away on his pipe
The tobacco has stained his teeth → note the simile
The farmer is ‘part of the machine’ → he does not do the real physical labour.
He supervises

**Lines 13 – 16**

The men working in the fields are now mentioned
They are thick-limbed (have well-built arms) because of the hard labour they perform every day.
They are ‘earthy’ people
They wear vests because of the extreme heat, and they are caked with dirt from their labour.

**Lines 17 – 19:**

The workers are working in the blazing sun.
The sun is personified ‘lashes the workers’
This image also suggests the cruel conditions under which the labourers work.
‘red hot rod’ → indicates how hot it is out in the sun → has connotations of being painful.

**Lines 20 – 23:**

The labourers take a break
‘brine-bathed brow’ → (sweat) alliteration which speaks to the hot conditions they are working in and how hard they are working.
The work is extremely physical and made harder by the extreme heat.
‘brine’ → salty water used for pickling food → sweat compared to brine.
They ‘drink from battered cans’ → they are also battered by the hard labour that they have to endure.
‘battered cans’ also speaks to the fact that they are poor → they do not have neat, shiny flasks.
‘maheu’ → fermented maize drink

**Line 24:**

The labourers have quenched their thirst

**Line 25 - 28:**

The men have grown strong from their hard labour and can easily lift the heavy bags.
‘like feather cushions’ → simile
Women are compared to ‘prancing wild mares’ → they look forward to the end of the day.
‘the reapers will rest in their kraals’ → although their homes were often referred to as ‘kraals’, a ‘kraal’ is also an enclosure where cattle is kept.
One could imply that the workers are dehumanised and compared to cattle.
Mood

➢ The mood is oppressive, and this is illustrated by the description of the conditions under which the labourers work.

QUESTIONS AND MEMORANDUM

1.1 What are the labourers doing?
They are working on farmlands in the “blazing, hot sun” under strenuous and difficult circumstances.

1.2 What equipment do they have?
Their hands and bags to throw in the mealie cobs. Most likely, a Gallic reaper tool to make the cutting a bit easier.

1.3 Describe the weather conditions.
Dusty, dry and extremely hot. Describes the sun as something that “lashes” and they stop to wipe off a “brine-bathed brow”

1.4 What do they drink when they are thirsty?
Maheu - it is a sour maize-based fermented gruel or beverage consumed mainly by the indigenous people of South Africa. Maize is the main substrate used in its fermentation. Amahewu (traditional spelling) can be kept in a cool place for many days and serves as a refreshing energy drink both for adults and children.

2.1 Identify the poetic device used in stanza 4.
Personification

2.2 Discuss how it contributes to your understanding of the labourers working conditions.
They were harsh (faces furrowed!) and difficult (bend, toss, lashes), long and tedious hours of working.

3. Refer to lines 25 – 26
Identify the figures of speech and how they illustrate the effect of the break that the labourers have taken.
“Men jerk bags like feather cushions - simile
And women become prancing wild mares;” metaphor-
Politically and culturally encoded strong language - wild mares have the connection of uninhibited freedom, it is a romantic expression of nature and the forces of nature - they are human, not just machine-like workers. The verb “jerk” is loaded and shows frustration and anger, no respect - it creates the idea of an explosive situation. They long for freedom and want to be free of any oppression.

4. In your opinion does the poet succeed in conveying the extreme working conditions of the workers. Give a reason for your answer by referring closely to the text.
Learner’s own answer. In my opinion yes.
He used strong verbs - as previously discussed. He creates a stark contrast between the farmer boss on his tractor and the slaving workers. (Any suitable quotes to support these ideas)

Second set of questions- short paragraphs

a) Give a briefly summary situation as described by the speaker. [5]
➢ It reflects on the plight of farm workers who were black and that the theme of the poem is mainly about the exploitation of labour, rather than a neutral “description” of labourers. In this poem the poet points out the harsh conditions under which many
labourers work. He faithfully records the suffering of the workers as he evokes the tedium, the sweat and exhaustion of this kind of manual labour.

b) According to the poet, is reaping an easy job? Briefly discuss with the aid of quotes from the poem.

No, their “faces are furrowed”- that means their faces are wrinkled, they have bags that are tied to “wasp waists”- it means they are carrying a heavy bag due to the crops or it could also refer to malnourishment, they “bend” and the verb “toss” shows frustration, it is dusty and the man on the tractor creates the idea of a relentless slave master driving them like cattle. The sun “lashes” also creates the idea that circumstances are cruel. (Any similar examples or ideas are acceptable)

c) By focusing on the fourth stanza, discuss how Mtshali vivifies his meaning with the use of figurative language.

“The sun lashes” is a salient metaphor and implies that the sun is a cruel and relentless slave master, not scared to hand out a severe punishment if the workers do not comply with the conditions of work. It supports the idea of oppression, suffering, torture and injustice. Mtshali implies that they are almost victims to the circumstances, but on the other hand they are heroic and shows perseverance.

d) Identify the midline rhyme which predominates in this poem and briefly discuss how it aids the poem’s reading.

It is mainly written in free verse and the message relies strongly on sound devices using half-rhyme like alliteration and assonance. He uses alliteration like “faces furrowed” and assonance “wet with sweat”- showing deep lines of suffering. In stanza 2 he strongly emphasises the “wasp waists’ to create once again the idea of suffering and struggle, whether it is from malnutrition or loaded bags that shows richness and wealth in the harvest, something that the labourers do not share in. The repetitive “row upon row” implies again the idea of a good harvest and wealth to the man with the yellow-stained teeth. It also shows how big this task is- there are rows still to harvest and despite the fact that they are tired, it waits to be done. The “desert” tanker rhymes with dust and supports the idea of dust and heat. The alliterative “pipe-puffing man” that shows relaxation stands in stark contrast with the workers who are “wet with sweat”. His “tobacco stained teeth”- alliteration creates a terribly negative image of cruelty and a laissez fair kind of attitude while his workers are slaving their days away. The “thick-limbed labourers “alliteration shows strength but can also refer to swollen legs and feet due to the long hours of working and bending down, carrying heavy loads. “Baked brown vests”- once again the alliteration supports the idea of hardship and strenuous working conditions in extreme heat. The red-hot rod alliteration and assonance create a strong rhythmic pattern of suffering. The alliteration “brine-bathed brow” which is also a metaphor further supports the idea of extreme suffering. (Now – you have listened to a discussion of this and I include it here again). The main idea is that the half-rhyme supports the main idea of the poem; oppression and hard work under difficult circumstances, farm workers’ lives are sometimes miserable and hard. By using half-rhyme and strong figures of speech, he does not openly criticise what happens to them, but rather let the reader decide how he/she feels about the circumstances of the workers. There are more examples- please discuss them. (Definitely a poetry essay type of question)

e) In what way(s) does the maheu help the workers?

Please look at the word description. It refreshes them, give them energy, give them power to complete this arduous task.

f) Does this poem carry a social message for the reader? Discuss briefly.

Please look at the structure of a paragraph before you answer.
This will be your own answer, but I think if you listened to the discussion and you take into consideration all aspects of what was discussed in the memos up to this point, you must be able to write a sensible answer here.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aqn9s9mUj78