

**Sydney Clouts**  
**Karoo Stop**  
**Still more challenging questions!**

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Sydney Clouts was a South African poet. He was born in Cape Town in 1926 and educated first at the South African College School and then at the University of Cape Town where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1950. He worked in an insurance company and then as bookseller before moving into the publishing world where he became editor for the International Press Agency in Cape Town. In 1961 he relocated to London, where he would remain -- apart from an occasional visit to South Africa.

He began to write poetry in the 1950s and these were printed in South African magazines. They had limited readership, however, which meant that he failed to receive any immediate recognition. Although Clouts wrote few poems, he is nevertheless remembered as one of the most creative of South African poets. Indeed, in 1968 he received both the Olive Schreiner and the Ingrid Jonker prizes for poetry. He was married and had three sons, but died in 1982 at the age of 56.

His poem -- "Karoo Stop" -- recalls a vivid memory of a very long coal train passing them while his passenger train was halted in a karoo siding. The poet uses several interesting devices to present the length of the coal train and the monotony of its rolling past them. He also plays with many words which rhyme with "coal". Can you work out why?

1. "A horse and a foal  
beyond were meagre to it, coal-  
black horse and foal,  
and far-off clouds stroll white  
in little mounds, and the coal  
in mounds and piles that crawl  
and crawl."

- Do you think that the horse and its foal were really coal-black? (4)
- Comment on the juxtaposition of the clouds with the coal trucks. (4)
- Comment on the words "that crawl and crawl". (4)

2. "A sigh, a grunt from us all,  
with one exception: I saw patrol  
like a mole  
underground, through walls  
of skewer patience, cold and fire,  
an old old  
man's sharp smile, an old  
man wrinkled small  
with teeth like coal."

- Why would there have been "a sigh, a grunt from us all"? (4)
- Can you explain the poet's description of "skewer patience"? (4)
- Why did the old man "patrol like a mole underground"? (4)
- Why does the poet refer to "cold and fire"? (4)
- Why is the old man "wrinkled small"? (4)

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