GRADE 11
SBA REVIEW

ABANDONED FARMHOUSE
Abandoned Farmhouse  
By Ted Kooser  

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes  
On a pile of broken dishes by the house;  
A tall man too, says the length of the bed  
In an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,  
Says the Bible with a broken back  
On the floor below the window, dusty with sun;  
But not a man for farming, say the fields  
Cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall  
Papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
Covered with oilcloth, and they had a child  
Says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.  
Money was scarce, says the jars of plum preserves  
And canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar-hole,  
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.  
It was lonely here, says the narrow gravel road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house  
In the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields  
Say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars  
In the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.  
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard  
Like branches after a storm – a rubber cow,  
A rusty tractor with a broken plow,  
A doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

11. I. C. 2: Benchmark: Demonstrate critical thinking skills to evaluate information and solve problems.  
Performance standard: Use critical analysis to gain meaning, develop thematic connections, and synthesize ideas by:  
analyzing stylistic features such as word choice and links between sense and sound.

1. In the first stanza, line 5, the poet describes “the Bible with a broken back”. The poet most likely chose this description to help the reader:

A. understand that the man who lived in the farmhouse worked endlessly and looked for comfort and answers to his troubles in the Bible  
B. understand that the man who lived in the farmhouse was careless with his possessions  
C. understand that the man who lived in the farmhouse spent all his time reading the Bible when he should have been farming  
D. understand that the man in the farmhouse disliked religion and therefore threw the Bible onto the floor
2. In the second stanza, the poet offers clues that the people who once inhabited the farmhouse were impoverished. Identify the clues and explain how they reflect a life of hardship and hard work.

3. In the final stanza of the poem “Abandoned Farmhouse,” the poet offers the reader evidence of what fate befell the family who once inhabited the homestead. Explain what most likely became of the family and why, using evidence from the entire poem to support your conclusions.

ANSWER KEY

1. A
2. Evidence includes: Money was scarce
   And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
   It was lonely here…narrow gravel road.
3. Answers will vary