

UNIT 2: Poetry Passage Questions: tackling the selected poem questions; commenting on poetic features, preparing material for an essay.

Recommended Prior Knowledge: A reasonable standard of written English and familiarity with reading poetry gained at O level or IGCSE.

Context: This Unit is designed to help students acquire the skills to answer the selected poem essay questions on Paper 3. It can be undertaken at any time during the course.

Outline: This Unit addresses the understanding and appreciation of poetry, its characteristic features and techniques.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p>1. <u>What To Look For in a Poem</u></p> <p>Students need to develop an awareness and appreciation of how poetry works. In a range of short poems students become accustomed to looking for and discussing poetic features and how they contribute to the meaning of a poem.</p>	<p>Students and the teacher choose a range of poems, short enough to allow careful focus on the language and techniques. As the poems are read out, the students should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the poem have a particular point of view or narrative position? Is the poem spoken? Does it have a personal viewpoint ('I')? Is it an external observation? • Is the poem broken into <i>stanzas</i>? What effects does this have? Is any <i>rhythm</i> or beat evident? Is there any play on similar sounding words (<i>rhyme</i> and <i>assonance</i>) or other patterns (<i>alliteration</i>)? What is emphasised by these patterns? Take note of the title, the beginning and the end. • What kind of language is used in the poem? Is it formal or informal? Does it present the ideas attractively or unattractively? Do the words chosen have similar associations (<i>semantic field</i>)? What <i>tone</i> is created by the choice of language? • What associations are created by the <i>imagery</i> of the poem? What kinds of comparisons are made in the <i>similes</i> and <i>metaphors</i>? Are the comparisons appropriate, unconventional or surprising? 	<p>A range of short poems. Examples could include <i>The Lamb</i> and <i>The Tyger</i> (Blake), <i>My Busconductor</i> (McGough), <i>Ozymandias</i> (Shelley), <i>He and She</i> (Rossetti), <i>Telephone Conversation</i> (Soyinka) for example.</p> <p><i>The Language of Literature</i> by Adrian Beard (Routledge A Level English Guides ISBN 0-415-28633-6) is useful and opens with a very good section on poetry, with some detailed working through short example poems.</p> <p>Exemplar A for Unit 2.pdf and Exemplar B for Unit 2.pdf demonstrate what students might be expected to pick out in <i>Ozymandias</i> and <i>Telephone Conversation</i>.</p>

2. Point of View

Students develop an awareness and appreciation of Point of view, Perspective and Narrative position in poetry.

Students and the teacher choose a range of poems for careful focus on the point of view or narrative position. Through discussion, students should consider:

- Does the poem have a clearly defined narrator? Does it have a first person narrator, a story-teller, an observer?
- Is there only one point of view in the poem, or does it alter? How are any changes signalled to the reader?
- Does the point of view give the poem a bias or particular angle? If there are different points of view, are they complementary or contrasting?
- If the poem has a first person narrator, is this person necessarily the poet?

Examples taken from Poetry text which represent a range of Points of View. Examples might include *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *To Leigh Hunt Esq.* (Keats), *A Man I Am*, *Suburb* (Smith), *Telephone Conversation* (Soyinka), *Piano and Drums* (Okara).

A quick guide to the techniques of reading poetry can be found at: <http://www.pfmb.uni-mb.si/eng/dept/eng/poetry/index.htm>
The site also has a useful collection of poems from different periods of English Literature.

3. Shape and Pattern

Students develop an awareness and appreciation of shape and pattern in poetry. They also acquire some technical vocabulary.

Students and the teacher choose a range of poems for careful focus on shape and pattern. Through discussion, students should consider:

- What does the title of the poem suggest? What first impressions of the subject matter does it give?
- How does the opening of the poem work? Does it form an introduction, or is it a sudden opening? Can the reader immediately locate him/herself, or not?
- Do the ideas of the poem develop through stanzas? Is each stanza separate, or do ideas and sentences cross from one stanza to the next? Are the stanzas of regular construction?
- Does the poem feature any repetitions of words, phrases, sounds (*assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia*) or grammatical constructions?
- Do sentences run from one line to the other (*enjambement*) or sometimes stop in the middle of a line (*caesura*)?
- Is there a rhyming pattern in the poem to create links between words and ideas?
- Is there a prevailing rhythm, and if so, is it ever disturbed? Look in particular at the beginnings of lines and for gatherings of stressed syllables.
- How does the ending of the poem work? Is it a logical development, or provide a twist on what has gone before?

Here it will be appropriate for students to learn the names of certain forms of poems as they meet them, such as *sonnet, ballad, villanelle, etc.*

Examples taken from Poetry text which represent a range of different forms. Examples might include *The Eve of St. Agnes, To Autumn* (Keats), *To the Tune of the Coventry Carol, Who Is This Who Howls and Mutters?* (Smith), *Ozymandias* (Shelley), *Rising Five* (Nicholson).

<http://www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm> is an on-line glossary of literary terms, which is fully searchable from your browser software.

<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/vclass/terms.htm> is a more academic version, but has the advantage of giving examples. It also has a section on grammatical terms which may be useful.

<p>4. <u>Language and Tone</u></p> <p>Students develop an awareness and appreciation of language and tone in poetry.</p>	<p>Students and the teacher choose a range of poems for careful focus on language and tone. Through discussion, students should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the language of the poem complex or simple, formal or informal? Is this connected with the Point of view? • Is the chosen vocabulary complementary, or are contrasts created? • Is the vocabulary drawn from a similar area of association (<i>semantic field</i>)? • What responses are created by the vocabulary (shock, humour, disgust, excitement etc)? 	<p>Examples taken from Poetry text which represent a range of different forms. Examples might include <i>Lamia</i>, <i>Ode to a Nightingale</i> (Keats), <i>The River God, I Rode With My Darling...</i> (Smith), <i>The Early Purges</i> (Heaney), <i>Easter Morning - The African Intellectual</i> (Nicol).</p>
<p>5. <u>Imagery</u></p> <p>Students develop an awareness and appreciation of imagery in poetry. They also acquire some technical vocabulary.</p>	<p>Students and the teacher choose a range of poems for careful focus on imagery. Through discussion, students should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of comparisons are made in the <i>similes</i> and <i>metaphors</i> in the poem? How do they contribute to the poem's meaning? • Is such imagery open to interpretation? Does each student respond to it in the same way? • Are there any other figures of speech in the poem, such as examples of <i>hyperbole</i>, <i>metonymy</i>, <i>onomatopoeia</i>, <i>oxymoron</i>, <i>paradox</i>, <i>pathetic fallacy</i>, <i>personification</i>, <i>pun</i>? What do these contribute to the meaning? 	<p>Examples taken from Poetry text which represent a range of different forms. Examples might include <i>On First Looking into Chapman's Homer</i>, <i>Ode on a Grecian Urn</i> (Keats), <i>Nor We of Her to Him, Not Waving But Drowning</i> (Smith), <i>Thistles</i> (Hughes), <i>Musée des Beaux Arts</i> (Auden).</p>

6. Writing Exam-Style Essays

This prepares students for the type of question they will face for the selected poem essay in the examination (the *b* question).

The selected poem questions (always the *b* option) always ask for a close and detailed commentary on the set poem or poems. Questions frequently ask candidates to 'comment closely' on the poem and sometimes ask them to choose another poem to compare with the one on the question paper. In other questions, candidates may be asked to make a judgement about how 'typical' or 'characteristic' a poem is of the ones studied. The teacher should discuss the implications of these types of questions with the students.

The pointers above give students a working method to approach the poems for this question. They should, though, always remember that they must comment on the effects of any technique they notice and how it contributes to the meaning of the poem. They will not gain marks for spotting the techniques alone.

They are now prepared to attempt their first examination style essay question.

Past papers (available from CIE).