

POETRY REVISION



Unseen Poetry Booklet

HDHS GCSE Literature Exam

- This section of the paper is in two parts.
- Part a is worth 24 marks. Students will be given an unseen poem with an accompanying essay question
- Part b is worth 8 marks. Students will be given another unseen poem and will a comparison question about a shared theme / idea of the two unseen poems.

Part a:

A01: 12 Marks

A02: 12 Marks

Part b: **A02:**
8 marks

SECTION B: UNSEEN POETRY

In Section B you will be asked to analyse a poem you have never seen before, spending just 30 minutes planning and writing your answer. This question is worth 24 marks. I have created a system for analysing unseen poems which I shall now share with you. However, before I do that, take a look at this unseen poem and the question that follows it.

BULLY

Your words cut into me, sharp as a knife
The pain that you cause always goes unseen
I curl up defenceless, scared for my life
Why do you always have to be so mean?

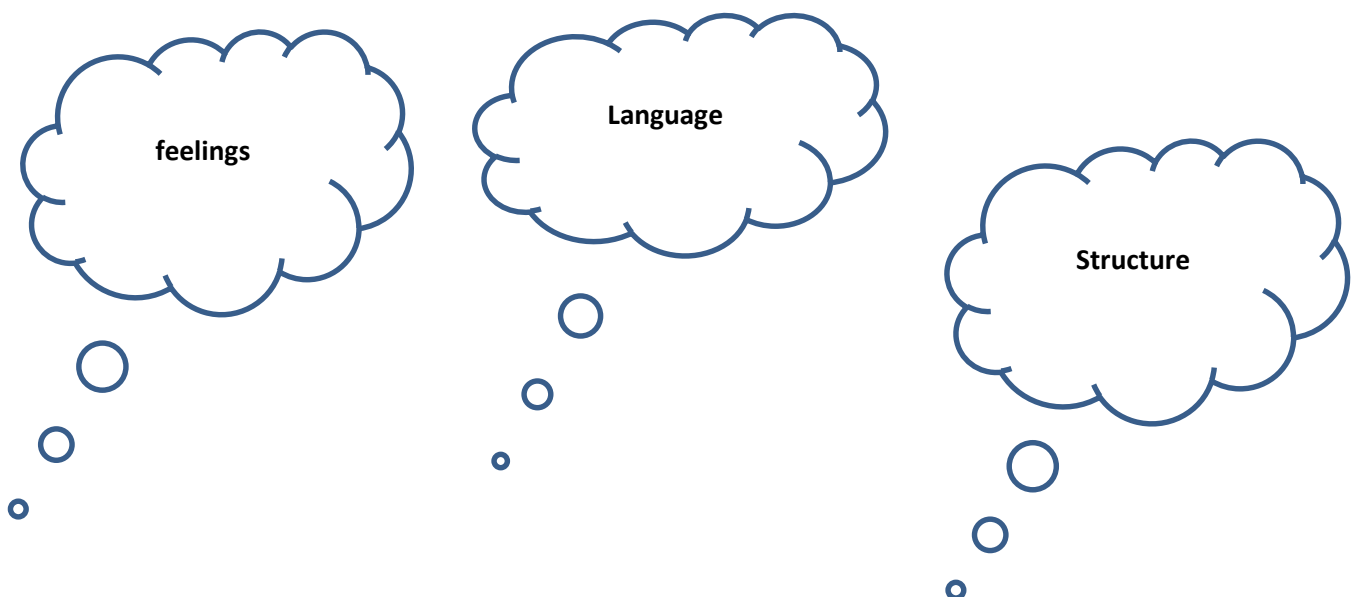
We met in our tutor group, class 1E
At first you barely saw that I was there
But soon your attention fell upon me
Your words were flying and always unfair

After a few years we became good friends
Most of the time, you were actually kind
But then those moments of friendship would end
The good times were gone – all kindness behind

But those very good times enriched my life
That's why in the end I took you as my wife

(Andrew Smith, 1981-)

Question: What is the poet's attitude to relationships? How is this presented in the poem?



There is more than one way to plan to answer this question. Find a way that works for you!

Here is one possible strategy and it involves 6 steps.

STEP 1: THINK ABOUT THE POET

Although you will almost certainly have never heard of the poet in the exam, you can work out quite a lot from the name. To begin with, does it sound foreign or common? In the example above the name 'Andrew Smith' seems to be a British or maybe American name – there are certainly no clues that it may be the name of a non-English native. Secondly think about the sex – the fact that this poem is written by a man may play an important part of the analysis to come. Use the poet's name throughout your answer.

STEP 2: THINK ABOUT THE DATE

If there is a date listed you need to think about the life-time experiences of the poet and relate them to what you found out in step 1. For example, a poem from the 1600s written by a woman is going to be based in a context where women's rights were very different to today. In the poem above you can see that the poet is just over 30 years old. This means they have lived through the same sort of things you have lived through and share the same cultural experiences: the internet boom, TV, 9/11 etc. Of course you don't know exactly when the poem was written, but again your first impressions on the date can be important later on.

STEP 3: READING FOR MEANING

The exam board will choose a poem in this section which has both a simple meaning and a complex meaning. To begin with, read through the poem looking for the simple meaning. That is: what does this poem literally mean?

Using 'Bully' as an example, we can say that the poem is about two school enemies who later became friends and got married – that is the simple meaning.

- ❖ Write next to the poem the words 'obvious meaning' after **reading the poem for the first time** and write what you think the obvious meaning is
- ❖ Write next to the poem the words 'deeper meaning' after **reading the poem a second time** and write what you think what else the poem could be about-be brave and have a go!
- ❖ **Read a third time** with a pen-annotate as you read- if you see a sad word write sad next to it; if you think the lines are long write long sentences; if you spot rhyme write it on the poem. Simply write what you see.

STEP 4: LOOK FOR THE POETIC DEVICES

You should really do this at the same time as step 3, but look for the poetic devices used in the poem. For example: similes, metaphors, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm etc.

STEP 5: LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE AND FORM

How is the poem organised? When do the stanzas change and why? Does it follow the pattern of a type of poetry?

STEP 6: ANSWER THE QUESTION

Steps 1-5 should really only take 4 or 5 minutes to complete. Of course, they will take a lot longer whilst you are unpractised, so I have included a number of unseen poems in this booklet for you to practise with.

TOP TIPS FOR THE UNSEEN POETRY QUESTION:

- ☑ Analyse language, structure and form
- ☑ Write in PETER paragraphs
- ☑ Write about the poet's themes and the effect on the reader

Opening paragraph-

- ✓ Use the Key words from the question
- ✓ Use the title of the poem and the poet's name-Why did the poet choose the title of the poem?
- ✓ Identify the obvious meaning and attempt to identify a deeper meaning
- ✓ How does this poem make the reader feel?

D/C Grade SAMPLE ANSWER:

The poem 'Bully' is a poem about relationships and the poet's attitude to relationships. By calling the poem 'bully', Andrew Smith is straight away telling the reader that this is a poem about the negative side of relationships. It is unclear from the title who the bully is. It is clear that this relationship contains pain and suffering as well. This pain and suffering is clearly seen throughout the poem. The effect on the reader is that they may feel confused about these conflicting emotions, which is probably how Smith himself feels. The obvious meaning of this poem is that it is about two people who used to not have a good relationship in school but became friends later and got married. The obvious meaning is that relationships change. A deeper meaning is that the other person is still a bully. The deeper meaning is that relationships may look like they have changed but it may not be different. The poet's attitude to relationships is that they are not always straight forward. The word 'cause' makes me think that the abuse is still happening. If it was in the past, Andrew Smith would have used the word 'caused'.

Ok, so the part answer above is a good answer. It is structured in PEE paragraph format and comments on the effect on the reader. It analyses language and form, However, it really only focuses on a surface analysis – there is much more that could be said. So, how do you develop that answer into a stronger answer?

B/A grade sample answer:

Andrew Smith's attitude to relationships is that they are complex and multi-faceted. On the one hand, relationships are loving and romantic. This is seen through the use of the sonnet form. The poem follows the form of a Shakespearean sonnet: 14 lines of iambic pentameter, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme etc etc. By using the form of a famous type of love poetry, Smith is showing that the relationship is loving. However, the use of the sonnet form is more subversive in this poem – it isn't until the volta at the end where we actually realise this poem is about a marriage. The effect on the reader of this sharp twist is that they are surprised to see these seemingly combatant people are married. Perhaps Smith himself is surprised at how he has fallen into this marriage. On top of that it is very important to note that the poem is not a perfect sonnet – the last line 'That's why in the end I took you as my wife' contains 11 syllables where it should only contain 10. This suggests that there is more lurking under the surface of this seemingly happy marriage – perhaps it isn't quite so happy at all, but is a façade, just like the forced and ultimately inaccurate use of the sonnet form.

The language of the poem certainly does little to suggest the relationship is a happy one. By calling the poem 'bully', it is clear that this relationship contains pain and suffering as well. This pain and suffering is clearly seen throughout the poem. In fact, in verse one there is a suggestion that the relationship is still not happy, seen in the use of the verb 'cause'. This present tense usage is perhaps a subtle hint that the 'bullying' of their childhood is still taking place in their modern marriage. In this interpretation it could even be suggested that childhood bullying is a metaphor for domestic abuse. Smith might be covering the issue through childish imagery to reflect how he feels immature and childish to be the victim of domestic abuse and yet also be a man.

You can see that this answer is much more sophisticated than the first. It picks out subtleties and inconsistencies and analyses these persuasively. As with all poetry, you don't have to have the right answer – any answer is valid if it can be explained.

Section B: Unseen Poetry

Answer the question in this section. You are advised to spend about 30 minutes on this section.

Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

The Song of the Old Mother

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their days go over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

W B YEATS

What do you think the poet is saying about the old woman in the poem? How does he present his ideas? (18 marks)

A HIT POEM is another strategy to respond to an unseen poem. It is only useful if you know what each word refers to. Below is a quick explanation of each one.

About - what happens in the poem - what is it about?

Historical/Social Context - Any important contextual information. E.G. it may be a war poem from World War One

Imagery - What images are used & what effect do they have?

Techniques - What poetic techniques are used?

Personal response - what are your personal feelings about it?

Organisation - How has the poet structured the poem?

Emotions - What is the tone or mood?

Message - What is the theme? What is the poet's message

Let’s now look at how an answer following A HIT POEM could appear.

Song of the Old Mother

ABOUT

'Song of the Old Mother' by WB Yeats is about an old woman describing the chores that she does every day. In the first two lines the old woman gets out of bed then lights the fire. She cooks and cleans until nightfall. The woman thinks that young people are lazy and have a much easier and carefree life than she does. In the final two lines the woman says that she must work because she is old and at the end of the poem the fire, that took her a lot of effort to light, has gone out again.

HISTORICAL
CONTEXT

Written in 1899 and set in rural Ireland the poem reveals what life was like for peasant women in those times. As she is a poor and aging woman, her life is hard and very repetitive. WB Yeats uses this old woman to show what life was like for the poor and elderly in rural Ireland.

IMAGERY

'Song of the Old Mother' uses imagery very effectively. Words such as 'kneel', 'scrub' and 'sweep' convey the hard physical work that the old woman does every day while 'the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold' creates a mood of sadness as, despite all her efforts, the fire goes out. The image of the fire going out could symbolise her life coming to an end as, like the fire, she too is feeble and dying. Contrast is used to reveal the different lifestyles of the old woman and the young people. Images used to describe the young include 'the young lie long and dream in their bed' and 'their day goes over in idleness' which are very different to the images of drudgery used to describe the old woman's life. Such imagery has an emotive effect as it is intended to make us feel sympathetic for the woman and angry towards the idle young people.

TECHNIQUES

Yeats uses a number of poetic techniques in the poem. The metaphor 'the seed of the fire flicker and glow' creates a vivid image of the fire growing from a tiny spark to a full grown fire whilst the repetition of this image in the final line, 'the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold' emphasises how repetitive her life is. The metaphor of the fire getting weaker and dying also foreshadows the future for the old woman and creates sympathy for her.

PERSONAL
RESPONSE

Alliteration is used to contrast the hard work of the old woman with life of the young people. In 'the young lie long' the repeated 'l' sound creates a lazy, languid feel to emphasise the carefree, idle lifestyle of the younger generation. I find the final line of the poem very effective. 'And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold' makes me feel sad as it suggests that the old woman, who has had a life of drudgery and poverty, is nearing the end of her days.

ORGANISATION

The poem uses rhyming couplets and rhythm very cleverly. The rhyming couplets such as 'blow/glow' and 'old/cold' give the poem a repetitive feel like the woman's

work and the use of a steady rhythm makes the poem read like a song which fits with the title of the poem.

EMOTION

The poem has a sorrowful tone. The list of hard and menial jobs in the third line 'scrub and bake and sweep' makes the reader feel sorry for the old woman. The contrast between her day to day struggle and the idle life of the young adds to this gloomy mood and the line 'I must work because I am old', which suggests that the woman has no choice but to work until she dies, reinforces the melancholic feeling of the poem.

MESSAGE

'The Song of the Old Mother' deals with a number of themes. Yeats explores old age and the attitudes of elderly people towards the young. The poem also covers issues such as poverty and life in rural Ireland at the turn of the century. Maybe Yeats was trying to show what life was like for old people who have to do lots of work and perhaps he hopes that the poem will change people's attitudes towards poor elderly people

Exam question: Read the poem below and answer the question that follows.

A Marriage

You are holding up a ceiling
with both arms. It is very heavy,
but you must hold it up, or else
it will fall down on you. Your arms are tired, terribly tired,
and, as the day goes on, it feels
as if either your arms or the ceiling
will soon collapse.

But then
unexpectedly,
something wonderful happens:
Someone,
a man or a woman,
walks into the room
and holds their arms up
to the ceiling beside you.
So you finally get
to take down your arms.
You feel the relief of respite,
the blood flowing back
to your fingers and arms.
And when your partner's arms tire,
you hold up your own
to relieve him again.
And it can go on like this
for many years
without the house falling.

Michael Blumenthal

What do you think are the feelings about marriage in this poem **and** how does the poet present these feelings to the reader? (18 marks)

Seed

The first warm day of spring
and I step out into the garden from the gloom
of a house where hope had died
to tally the storm damage, to seek what may
have survived. And finding some forgotten
lupins I'd sown from seed last autumn
holding in their fingers a raindrop each
like a peace offering, or a promise,
I am suddenly grateful and would
offer a prayer if I believed in God.
But not believing, I bless the power of seed,
its casual, useless persistence,
and bless the power of sun,
its conspiracy with the underground,
and thank my stars the winter's ended.

Paula Meehan

1. What in your view is the message in this poem? Explain briefly how the poet conveys this? Make reference to the text in support of your answer.

WAITING

My love will come
will fling open her arms and fold me in them
will understand my fears, observe my changes.
In from the pouring dark, from the pitch night
without stopping to bang the taxi door
she'll run upstairs through the decaying porch
burning with love and love's happiness,
she'll run dripping upstairs, she won't knock,
will take my head in her hands,
and when she drops her overcoat on a chair
it will slide to the floor in a blue heap.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

1. What are the writer's thoughts about love? What techniques does the poet use to show his feelings?

Read the following poem by Pakistani poet, Imtiaz Dharker, in which she celebrates the importance of water to a community, and answer the questions which follow.

Blessing

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.
Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.
Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation: every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,
and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.
Imtiaz Dharker

1. From your reading of this poem what do you learn about the people in it and the place where it is set? What techniques does the poet use to convey the atmosphere in the poem. Support your answer with reference to the poem.

