

Unseen Poetry

Introduction

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Unseen poetry

Leave it until the end of the
exam

Spend roughly twenty
minutes on this section



Examine the poem closely

- ✦ Introduction: If there is one, be sure to read it. It is there for a reason.
- ✦ Title: Does the title tell you anything about the theme of the poem? What are the connotations of the word or words in the title? What expectations are set up?

- ✦ Theme: What is the main message of the poem? Love, war, childhood, memories, literature and the beauty of nature are common themes.
- ✦ Tone: Think of the tone of voice you would use if you were to read the poem aloud. Does the tone change as the poem progresses?
- ✦ Rhythm: Is the pace of the poem fast or slow? Does this tell us anything about the theme or tone? Does the rhythm vary? Look at the punctuation. Are there run-on lines?

Past Papers - Themes

- ✦ 2018 - Two ivory swans by Moya Canon: Art / The passage of time
- ✦ 2017 - Bounty by Robyn Sarah: Gratitude / Make the most of what we have
- ✦ 2016 - And Yet the Books by Czeslaw Milosz: Literature will prevail
- ✦ 2015 - Peter Street by Peter Sirr: Love, loss, acceptance, moving on
- ✦ 2014 - The Peninsula by Seamus Heaney: Nature / sustaining power of nature/ inspiration

- 2013 - The Fist by Derek Walcott: Love / pain of love / moving on / loss
- 2012: The Beautiful Lie by Sheenagh Pugh: Power of words / childhood / growing up
- 2011: Poetry by Leanne O'Sullivan: Literature / inspiration / frustration
- 2010: Seed by Paula Meehan: Nature / hope / life / growth / gratitude
- 2009: Father's Old Blue Cardigan by Anne Carson: Love / ageing / loss / parent and child
- 2008: Those Winter Sundays by Robert Hayden: Love / loss / parenting / complex relationships

Rhyme Scheme

- ✦ Is there a rhyme scheme?
- ✦ What is the effect of this on the poem?
- ✦ Is there full rhyme at the end of the poem?

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Tenses

- ✦ What tense or tenses are used? Make a note of these.
- ✦ Does the tense change?
- ✦ If so, does this indicate that the poet has reached a conclusion?
- ✦ Does the poem switch to the present tense - as in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' for example? Does this show that the poet has become deeply involved with the issue?
- ✦ Is something unresolved in the poem and is this shown through the tense or tenses used?

Important Point

- ✦ A common mistake students make is to point out features of style without explaining what effect they have.
- ✦ Every time you point out a feature of style, use a verb to say what effect it has.
- ✦ The soft 'l' and 's' sounds in the alliterative line 'I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore' **add** to the peaceful atmosphere of the poem.

Language / Imagery

- ❖ Remember that this is not a reading comprehension exercise. You are expected to use key literary terms.
- ❖ Sound / musical qualities are important
- ❖ Broad vowel sounds slow down a poem
- ❖ Harsh sounds may reflect the poet's mood

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To whom is the poet speaking?

- ✦ Does the poet address the subject of the poem directly?
- ✦ Is there a sense of intimacy?
- ✦ Does the poet address the reader?
- ✦ Does the poet assume another persona?

Personal Response

- ✦ Did you like it?
- ✦ Why / Why not?
- ✦ You must explain yourself fully here.

The Question

- ✦ Check how many marks are awarded for each question
- ✦ Theme, tone, language, imagery, sound qualities, structure, rhythm, rhyme, personal response
- ✦ Don't forget to quote!

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Sample Answers and Approaches

- ✦ I have written sample answers for the Unseen Poems from 2009 to 2016 inclusive. These can be found on www.educateplus.ie
- ✦ There are additional sample answers and slideshows on my website

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