

Introduction to Paper Two

You have 2 ½ hours to complete Paper 2.

There are 3 sections. Spend about 45 minutes on **each section**.

Each section carries 60 marks. (180 marks in total)

Section 1: Drama

Question One - Unseen Drama = 30 marks

Question Two - Studied Drama = 30 marks

Section 2: Poetry

Question One - Unseen Poetry = 30 marks

Question Two - Studied Poetry = 30 marks

Section 3: Fiction

Question One - Unseen Fiction = 30 marks

Question Two - Studied Fiction = 30 marks

Timing

As you can see, there are six questions in total on Paper 2, each carrying equal marks. No question is more important than another, give each one the same amount of time and preparation between now and the Junior Certificate. On the day of the exam, make sure that you spend no more than 20/25 minutes on any single question. If you overrun your first three answers by five minutes each, for example, you will not have enough time left to finish your last question. Take your watch off (if you don't have one, get one between now and the Junior Certificate as phones will not be allowed into the exam hall) and put it on the desk in front of you. Keep checking that you are within the time you have allowed yourself for the question and if you are running out of time, wind up your answer quickly and leave a space beneath it if necessary. You can always come back to it if you have a few minutes to spare at the end of the exam.



Choosing your question

It's always a good idea to start with the question that you like best. If fiction is your favourite, you may wish to start with that section. Do remember to number all your questions very carefully. Do not assume the examiner will know which question you are answering.



Approaching the question

For each and every question in your exam, you should go through the following checklist:

- ✓ Read the question carefully. Read it again. Paraphrase it (put it into your own words).
- ✓ Underline any key words in the question.
- ✓ Check how many parts there are to the question. For example, are you asked to point out a feature of style AND comment on the impact it had on you.
- ✓ Jot down a quick plan for your answer. This may be as simple as one or two words for each point you intend to make. If you do this, you will be less likely to repeat yourself, write a disorganised answer or forget what you wanted to say.
- ✓ Look through each of the points you plan to make. Can each one be directly linked back to the question you have been asked? It is very easy to wander off the point; if you check this at the planning stage, it won't take you long to correct it.
- ✓ When you are happy with your plan and have decided on the order in which you are going to write your points, begin your answer.
- ✓ Make a point, develop it and support it with a suitable quotation or reference. Don't leave your quotations or references hanging in the middle of the answer, explain them by linking them to the point you are making. 'From this quote, we can see that.....' or, 'we can see that Demetrius does not love Helena, "I love thee not" '.
- ✓ Avoid simply giving a summary of the text. It doesn't matter how long your answer is, or how beautifully phrased it is, if you don't give your own analysis and make valid points which answer the question asked, you will not get a passing grade.

- ✓ Do give your own opinion, provided you can justify it and back it up with relevant quotations or references. Remember that the pieces chosen for the Junior Cert exam are generally thought to be good examples of their genre, so think carefully before saying you dislike them. You may, of course, say you don't like a poem or an extract from a play or novel but it is often much more difficult to explain why something doesn't appeal to you than to say why it does.

Marking your answer

- ✓ **Content:** Obviously, this is the most important aspect of your answer in Paper 2. In order to get high marks here, you need to make strong, relevant points. A very general rule would be one point/well-supported paragraph per 5 marks. In other words, if it is a 15 mark question, you should make at least 3 points. It is a good idea to include a brief introduction and/or conclusion also, if you have time. Show that you are able to evaluate the text and produce a personal response to it. All the points you make must be supported by relevant quotations or references to the text. As I said earlier, these must be linked back to the point you are making. Avoid long quotations: it is far better to use short, meaningful ones.
- ✓ **Structure:** Organise your answer properly. This is where planning is invaluable. At the planning stage, make sure that your points are in a logical order, that one leads to the next and that each paragraph develops the answer.
- ✓ **Expression:** The examiner will be looking for an answer in which the language is varied and interesting. When writing, try to make your paragraphs flow into one another rather than making a series of disjointed, separate points. Again, planning will help here. Avoid repetition and clichés. Try to think of a variety of descriptive words rather than saying 'nice' and 'good' over and over. Keep your sentences short.
- ✓ **Mechanics:** The examiner will mark you down for poor spelling and punctuation. Use your common sense here, many of the words you need to use will be written on the paper for you. Refer back to the unseen texts in particular when you are writing your answer. It will look sloppy and careless if you spell a person's name incorrectly when it is repeated many times in the extract.

Introduction to Unseen Poetry

About the unseen poetry section

In this section, worth 30 marks, you will be asked questions on a poem you have probably never seen before. Remember, the poem has been carefully chosen to be accessible to Junior Cert students so the chances are that you will understand it fairly easily if you approach it calmly and sensibly.

Read the poem two or three times before attempting to answer the questions. You may wish to read the questions after the first reading, just to set you on the right track. Re-read the poem again once or twice before putting pen to paper. Think of the poem as a comprehension piece; the answers are there in front of you, all you have to do is pick them out.

It is essential to read the questions very, very carefully. There may be two or three questions and there may be choices within the question.

When you are reading the poem, ask yourself a series of questions:

- ✓ Does the title tell us anything? Is there an introduction to the poem? As in the drama section, this can be a great help.
- ✓ Who is speaking in this poem? (It is worth noting the title and the poet's name, these may give you a hint. Remember, however, that a poet may be speaking from the point of view of a person of a different age or sex, or even as themselves when they were a child.)
- ✓ Does the poet address the subject of the poem directly? Look out for use of the word "You". If the poet does this, then it creates a sense of intimacy.
- ✓ What is the poem about? In other words, what is the main message (theme) the poet is trying to get across to the reader?
- ✓ What is the tone of the poem? Is it happy or sad, nostalgic or bitter for example?

Try to imagine the poet reading the poem aloud. What tone of voice do you think he or she would use? This can help you work out the mood of the poem. Watch out for irony: the poet saying one thing but meaning another.

- ✓ Does the tone of the poem change at all? Sometimes a poet may be angry at the start of a poem but calm and reflective by the end.
- ✓ Rhythm - Is the pace of the poem fast or slow? Does this tell us anything about the theme or the tone? (A slow rhythm is often associated with sadness.) What effect does the rhythm have? Does the rhythm vary? If so, why? Poems can have exciting moments in between calm, reflective ones.
- ✓ Look at the images in the poem. Are they effective? Do you like them?
- ✓ Look at the tense or tenses used in the poem. The present tense can suggest immediacy or an unresolved issue. The past tense can indicate that the poet has come to terms with the issue. Does the tense change at all? (Think of the tense change in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree".) What does the tense change tell you?
- ✓ Think about the literary terms you learnt when studying poetry in school. Start with sound, is there any alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia etc.? Underline these as you notice them.
- ✓ What other poetic techniques does the poet use? Are there metaphors, similes or symbols used? Are they effective? Do they help to create a picture in your mind?
- ✓ What kind of language is used in the poem? Is it modern? Is it easy to understand? Is there slang? If so, why do you think it is used?
- ✓ Do you like the poem?

This may seem like a lot to think about, and it certainly is, if you wait until the day of the exam to do it for the first time. Get into the habit of doing it well before June. You may not be able to answer all the questions when reading a poem for the first time, but they will steer you along the path to better understanding.

Typical Questions and How to Approach Them

While it is not possible to predict exactly what sort of questions will come up on the day of the exam, there are several that occur time and time again.

- ✓ **Theme** – the main message of the poem. You may be asked, "What does the poet think about...? Or, "Choose a different title for this poem." Both of these questions are asking you the same thing. What is the poet's main message? If you had to sum it up in a few words, what would those words be?
- ✓ **Tone** – the attitude of the poet towards the subject of the poem. You may be asked if you think the poem is happy or sad, or you may be asked how the poet feels about the topic dealt with in the poem. Watch out for the words "feeling", "attitude" and "mood" here. They can be a sign that the question is about tone.

As I said earlier, think of the tone of voice the poet would use if reading this poem aloud. Would the tone change as the poem progresses? Would some parts be read in a loud, excited voice and some in a quieter manner? The tone can change several times throughout the poem. If you notice changes as you are reading through it, jot them down on the page beside the relevant lines in the poem.

- ✓ **Style** – This is a very common question and there is every likelihood that it will come up in your exam. Watch out for phrases such as, "How does the poet give the impression that...? or, "Do you think the poet captures the scene well? You must refer to the language of the poem in your answer. By that I mean that you must discuss the imagery, sounds etc. This is your opportunity to use those key literary terms. It is important that you do so. (See below.) Start with sound: is there any alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia etc.? Remember, like the drama, poetry is really meant to be read aloud and the sound is very important.

When you comment on a feature of style, be sure to use a verb to say what that feature does. This is vital. You may be asked if the poet describes something effectively. Don't forget to say why the description is effective. Look at my

sample answer on the 2010 poem "Cinders" to see how this can be done.

- ✓ **Characters or relationships:** You may be asked what sort of person you think the poet or the subject of the poem is/was, based on what you have read. If you are asked "What impression do we get of this person?" then you must use words to describe character. Try to use at least one "character" word per paragraph. Look at my sample answer on the 2002 poem "Poem for Lara, 10" to see how this can be done.
- ✓ **Understanding-** You may be asked to explain certain lines from the poem. Make sure you give a detailed answer here. Don't just simply paraphrase the lines: say why you came to that decision about them. Look at my sample answer on the 2006 poem "Van Gogh's Yellow Chair" to see how this can be done.
- ✓ **Your response to the poem** – Did you like it? Why? Why not? You must explain yourself fully here. As I mentioned in the drama section, you are quite free to dislike the piece but you must be prepared to back up your viewpoint with plenty of examples and quotations. It is generally far easier to say that you liked the poem and go through your list of literary terms, picking out those that appear in the poem and saying that you found them particularly striking or effective or evocative.

Bear in mind that this is a question on poetry. Although the examiners want to see a personal response, they also want to see that it is based on a reasonably detailed analysis and evaluation of the poem. Look at my sample answer on the 2002 poem "Poem for Lara, 10" to see how this can be done.

- ✓ **Favourite image or images-** You may be asked to select one or two images from the poem and explain your choice. Be sure to write out the images in full before explaining why you chose them.

Key Literary Terms

Listed below are some key poetic terms that you should know. This is a basic list but should be sufficient to get you through the unseen poetry section. Remember, the examiner will be looking to see if you know what these terms mean, if you can identify them and if you can give examples from the poem.

- ✓ Alliteration – The repetition of initial consonant sounds. Alliteration can help to create a mood, repeated 's' sounds, for example, can make a line sound calm and soothing.
- ✓ Allusion – A reference to another writer or to something else which is not really part of the main body of the poem. For example, in 'Dulce et Decorum est' Wilfred Owen alludes to the work of the poet Horace when he quotes the Latin words in the title and at the end of the poem.
- ✓ Couplet – Two successive lines of poetry which have the same rhythm and rhyme. These two lines often contain a complete thought. All of Shakespeare's sonnets end with a couplet. Here is an example from Shakespeare's 'Shall I Compare Thee':

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

- ✓ Assonance – The repetition of vowel sounds.
- ✓ Enjambment - When a sentence continues into the next line of the poem without any punctuation marks. Enjambment is often used to suggest fast action or movement. It speeds the poem along by eliminating pauses.



- ✓ Imagery – Words used which create a vivid picture in your mind.
- ✓ Metaphor – A comparison in which the words 'like' or 'as' are not used. 'My love is a red, red rose.' Metaphors are stronger than similes.
- ✓ Onomatopoeia – Words which sound like their meaning: slap, squelch, thud, coo.
If you find this word difficult to spell, break it up:
Ono - mat - o - poeia (POE as in "poem").
- ✓ Repetition – Repeated words or phrases can emphasise the idea which is the poet is exploring. Repetition often occurs near the end of the poem and can help to bring it to a pleasing close as well as adding to the rhythm. An example of repetition used in this way can be seen in Shakespeare's 'Shall I Compare Thee':

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*
- ✓ Simile – A comparison in which the words 'like' or 'as' are used. 'My love is like a red, red rose.'
- ✓ Theme – The main message of the poem – what the poem is about. It is not the story of the poem. For example, the theme of Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is that there is neither honour nor nobility in dying for your country.
- ✓ Tone – The poet's attitude towards the subject of the poem. The tone might be bitter, affectionate, nostalgic, loving etc.



Sample Answer 1 – 2014 DEB

Read the following poem, *Geography Lesson* by Brian Patten, and then answer the questions which follow. (30)

Geography Lesson

Our teacher told us one day he would leave
And sail across a warm blue sea
To places he had only known from maps,
And all his life had longed to be.

The house he lived in was narrow and grey
But in his mind's eye he could see
Sweet-scented jasmine clinging to the walls,
And green leaves burning on an orange tree.

He spoke of the lands he longed to visit,
Where it was never drab or cold.
I couldn't understand why he never left,
And shook off the school's stranglehold.

Then halfway through his final term
He took ill and never returned.
And he never got to that place on the map
Where the green leaves of the orange trees burned.

The maps were redrawn on the classroom wall;
His name was forgotten, it faded away.
But a lesson he never knew he taught
Is with me to this day.

I travel to where the green leaves burn,
To where the ocean's glass-clear and blue,
To all those places my teacher taught me to love
But which he never knew.



Answer the following **three** questions. Each question is worth 10 marks.

1. From your reading of the poem, what impression do you get of the teacher?
Base your answer on evidence from the poem. (10)
2. How has the poet been affected by what he has learned from this teacher?
Explain your answer with reference to the poem. (10)
3. Do you like the poet's use of imagery in this poem?
Give reasons for your answer. (10)

Sample Answer to Question 1:

Note: The word 'impression' is usually a hint that the question is about character. Beware of just saying what the teacher did or said, but focus on what his words and/or actions tell you about him as a person.

Plan:-

Sad – unfulfilled dreams

Enthusiastic about 'lands he longed to visit'

The impression I get of the teacher is that he was a man who felt great passion for the subject he taught but whose dreams were unfulfilled.

Your opening sentence should directly address the question.

The teacher's enthusiasm and love for his subject was clearly communicated to his students, and the positive, descriptive language the poet uses when talking about these places reflects that. The teacher brought the two-dimensional world of the maps to life, helping the pupils to see places 'where the green leaves of the orange trees burned' and

In a poetry answer, you should comment on the language and the techniques the poet uses to achieve certain effects.

enabling them to see what he could in his 'mind's eye' when he imagined houses with 'Sweet-scented jasmine clinging to the walls'. These descriptions are wonderfully sensual; not only do we see these places but we feel the heat: 'where green leaves burn', and

smell the fragrant jasmine blossom. I think the that the ability to fire up his pupils' imagination in this way is part of what makes the subject of the poem such a great teacher.

Sadly, however, the teacher never managed to leave his 'narrow and grey' house or shake off 'the school's stranglehold' and travel to 'the lands he longed to visit'. During his final term, the teacher 'took ill and never returned'. His dreams were never realised and he faded from the collective memory of the school; even his name was forgotten. It is heart-breaking to think of the teacher ending his days without ever fulfilling his greatest desire, particularly when it was not something ridiculously out of reach but was just a holiday to a sunny place 'where the ocean's glass-clear and blue'. The contrast between the descriptions of the 'narrow and grey' house and the vivid, colourful places 'Where it was never drab or cold' heightens the reader's pity for this man who died without achieving his rather modest goal.

Short quotes should be woven into the fabric of the sentences.

Sample Answer to Question 2:

Plan:-

Taught the poet to love these places and to visit them

Taught the poet not to repeat teacher's mistake

I think that the teacher taught the poet to love the places they studied during the geography lessons, and also inspired him to travel and not just to live in a world of longing and dreams, as the teacher did.

The poet describes the places the teacher 'had only known from maps' in a way which shows that he loves these places as much as the teacher did. To the teacher, these countries were places you could imagine yourself living, in houses where fragrant jasmine was 'clinging to the walls' and the heat of the day caused leaves to burn on the tree. His enthusiasm was infectious, and now the poet travels 'to where the green leaves burn / To where the ocean's glass-clear and blue'.

The forward slash / tells the reader that the rest of the quote is on the next line in the original poem.

The other lesson the poet learned from the teacher is that it is important to follow your dreams and not to live for tomorrow. Although the teacher did not realise he was teaching the poet this, his lack of action and his unfulfilled desires affected his pupil so strongly that he says that this lesson is 'with me to this day'. It seems he is determined not to repeat his teacher's mistake. As a result, he travels 'to where the green leaves burn' and enjoys the reality of the places his teacher 'had only known from maps'.

Sample Answer to Question 3:

Plan:-

Contrast between reality and longing conveyed through images

Alliteration and assonance make the foreign lands attractive

I find the poet's use of imagery in this poem most effective and it definitely contributes to my enjoyment of the poem.

One aspect of the poem that I particularly like is the way in which the poet uses contrasting images to highlight the difference between the teacher's reality and the places he longs to visit. He dreams of a land in which he might find 'Sweet-scented jasmine clinging to the walls,' but instead of that he has 'the school's stranglehold'. I thought this was powerful as we can imagine the school as a parasitic plant, choking the teacher and draining him of life, as opposed to the beautiful jasmine filling the air with its perfume. Similarly, the teacher's 'narrow and grey house' is in stark contrast to the wide oceans which are 'glass-clear and blue'.

The way in which the poet appeals to our senses in his descriptions also made this poem an enjoyable read. Much as the young poet must have been, we are transported to these foreign lands because they are brought to life in such a way that we can not only see the 'glass-clear and blue' sea, but can also smell the fragrance of the jasmine on the walls and feel the heat of the sun in a place where 'the green leaves of the orange trees burn'. The repetition of this description of the burning leaves

Whenever you point out a feature of style (repetition in this case) use a verb to say what that feature does in the poem. Here I say that it emphasises the warmth of the foreign lands.



emphasises the warmth of a land
which is 'never drab or cold'.

Sample Answer 2 – 2010 SEC

Read the following poem *Cinders* by Roger McGough and answer the questions which follow. (30)

Cinders

After the pantomime, carrying you back to the car
On the coldest night of the year
My coat, black leather, cracking in the wind.
Through the darkness we are guided by a star
It is the one the Good Fairy gave you
You clutch it tightly, your magic wand.
And I clutch you tightly for fear you blow away
For fear you grow up too soon and - suddenly,
I almost slip, so take it steady down the hill.
Hunched against the wind and hobbling
I could be mistaken for your grandfather
And sensing this, I hold you tighter still.
Knowing that I will never see you dressed for the Ball
Be on hand to warn you against Prince Charmings
And the happy ever afters of pantomime.
On reaching the car I put you into the baby seat
And fumble with straps I have yet to master
Thinking, if only there were more time. More time.
You are crying now. Where is your wand?
Oh no. I can't face going back for it
Let some kid find it in tomorrow's snow.
Waiting in the wings, the witching hour.
Already the car is changing. Smells sweet
Of ripening seed. We must go. Must go.



Answer **two** of the following questions. Each question is worth 15 marks.

1. From your reading of the poem what do you learn about the relationship between the poet and his child? Base your answer on evidence from the poem.
2. Do you think the poet captures the scene well in this poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.
3. Do you think this poem is sad or happy or a mixture of both? Explain your answer with reference to the poem.

Sample Answer to Question 1:

From my reading of this poem, I think the poet has a **very** close relationship with his child. He addresses his daughter directly in the poem, using the word "You" repeatedly. This creates a sense of intimacy and makes us feel as if we are listening in to a private conversation. McGough clearly feels very **affectionate** towards his daughter and makes several references to hugging her tightly to him. He is **concerned** about his daughter's happiness and expresses dismay when he realises why she is crying: "Where is your wand?" Although he cannot face going back to get it, he is **obviously so in tune with his child** that he knows why she is upset. The lost wand is the sort of detail that a parent might well overlook at the end of a busy night out, but Roger McGough does not.

Your opening sentence should directly address the question.

Developing the answer means going into more detail about the point you made in the first sentence. In this case, explaining that McGough is affectionate, concerned about his daughter's happiness and intune with her feelings proves that he has a close relationship with his child. In each case, examples are given to support the point being made.

Though the relationship is a good one, the poet is sad about certain aspects of it. He is older than most fathers of little girls:

"I could be mistaken for your grandfather", and he is worried that he won't see his daughter grow up. He would like to be

there to see her "dressed for the Ball", but he knows he won't. His sadness is apparent as he reflects on the fact that he will not live long enough to tell his daughter about the realities of life and warn her "against Prince Charmings". His wish that there could be "more time" is a poignant one.

Like many fathers, the poet feels **very protective** of his little girl. He carries her back to the car, and holds her tightly "for fear you blow away". The words "for fear" are repeated in the next line, emphasising the **poet's concern for his daughter**. His feeling of

Link sentences make your answer flow well. This shows the examiner that you have planned your work.

protectiveness is not just for the girl's well-being now, but also for her future happiness. He wishes he could protect her always, but life, he suggests, is not really about the "happy ever afters of pantomime". This is certainly true in his case as he won't be around when his daughter reaches womanhood.

From my reading of this poem, it is clear to me that the poet is a loving and concerned father who has not only taken the trouble to bring his little girl to the pantomime, but has also immortalised the experience and expressed his love for his child in the form of a poem.

If you have time, a brief conclusion which sums up the main points of your answer can be helpful. It is not essential, however, and you can write a perfectly good answer without one. Different students write at different speeds.

Sample Answer to Question 2:

I think the poet captures the scene very well in this poem. The physical descriptions of a father carrying his young daughter back to the car on a cold winter's night are both realistic and evocative. The repeated 'ack' sounds in the third line: "My coat, black leather, cracking in the wind" mimic the sound I imagine the coat to make as it snaps in the cold wind. He says that he and his daughter are "guided by a star" and goes on to say it is the wand the little girl was given by the good fairy. This simply but effectively conjures up an image of the child proudly clutching the wand and holding it aloft as she is carried down the hill.

This is a question on style, so concentrate on the language of the poem. Don't just point out a feature of style: say what it does. In this case, link it back to the question by saying that it 'conjures up an image'...

The poet unflinchingly faces up to the fact that he is an older father, and ruefully describes himself as "Hunched against the wind and hobbling" as he picks his way carefully down the hill. This alliterative line and the one which follows it in which he admits that he "could be mistaken for your grandfather" draw us into the poet's moving but self-deprecating description of the scene. He tells us that he "fumbles with the straps" of the baby seat. This little detail adds to the poignancy and gives us the impression that there is much about practically parenting the little girl that causes him difficulties. It is easy to picture a frustrated McGough struggling with the nylon straps in the dark as the child cries for the lost wand.

Use poetic terminology throughout your answer.

Again, say what this image does. It makes it 'easy to picture' the father. This refers to the question.

I was struck by the way in which the poet blends the world of the pantomime and the real world to create a scene which is both charming and sweetly sad. The little girl is probably lost in the story of the pantomime she has just seen, and McGough's reflection that he will never see his daughter "dressed for the Ball", nor will he be "on hand to warn you against Prince Charmings" effectively captures the sad reality of the scene. Here he is, with his small daughter in his arms, clutching her tightly, and yet fully aware that he cannot hold her forever. The simple but descriptive language and the poet's bitter-sweet thoughts really bring the scene to life for me.

In each paragraph, reflect the wording of the question by mentioning the way in which the scene is created.

Sample Answer to Question 3:

I think that this poem is both happy and sad. It opens on a positive note and presents us with the heart-warming image of the poet carrying his beloved daughter back to the car after a night out together at the pantomime. Roger

Words like 'positive' and 'heart-warming' reinforce the idea that this is a happy image.

McGough is a caring father who holds his little girl as tightly as she holds her magic wand. She is precious to him and he clutches her to him 'for fear you blow away'. This concern for his child is touching but even in this early part of the poem there is a note of sadness in the poet's fear that his daughter will 'grow up too soon'.

The sadness in the poem centres on the poet's realisation that - as he is an older father - he will not always be there for his little girl, and he will not be around to see her 'dressed for the Ball.' This story will not end in 'happy ever afters'.

The poem becomes even sadder as the poet and his daughter reach the car. He struggles to tie the straps of the car seat and admits that he has 'yet to master' them. This could be a symbol for all the things he needs to learn about raising his little girl and the lack of time he has in which to do this. The poet's plaintive wish for 'More time' is emphasised by the repetition of this phrase at the end of the sixth stanza. The child is crying now as she has lost her wand and this adds to the feeling of sadness.

Although the poem ends on a melancholy note, with the poet keenly aware that his time with his daughter is limited, his love for her and his concern for her future is a constant throughout the poem. For this reason, I find the poem to be a blend of happiness and sadness.

Sample Answer 3 – 2006 SEC

Read the following poem, *Van Gogh's Yellow Chair* by Mark Roper, and then answer the questions which follow. (30)

Mark Roper

I would love to sit
in the yellow chair
in the painting

when a shadow lies
like a shy animal
in a corner

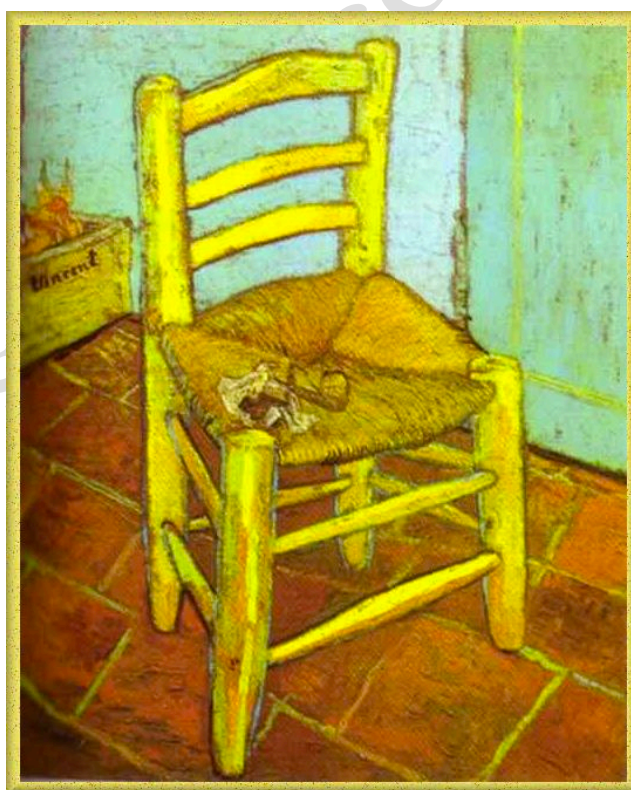
and the day's air
is like water in which
small noises swim

I would sit there
safe from harm
safe from all surprise.

Beyond the frame
on every side
the outside world

would open wide
but I'd have crossed
the great divide

so long as I never
rose from
that yellow chair.



Answer any **TWO** of the following questions. Each question is worth 15 marks.

1. "I would love to sit
in the yellow chair
in the painting..."

What is so appealing about Van Gogh's yellow chair, according to the speaker? Explain your answer with reference to the poem.

2. In your own words explain what is being said in the last three stanzas.
3. What is your favourite image from the poem? Explain your choice.

Sample Answer to Question 1:

I think that the speaker is drawn to the yellow chair because it offers him a chance to escape to a more attractive world.

The main point is made in the opening sentence

Everything about the chair and the room in which it sits in portrayed in a positive way. The yellow colour of the chair evokes feelings of warmth, sun and happiness. If the speaker were to sit in this chair, he could enjoy the calm atmosphere of his surroundings. There, all is peace. A shadow 'lies/ like a small animal in a corner' and the sounds of the outside world are muffled to 'small noises' by air

This question asked what is appealing about the yellow chair, so words like 'positive', 'happiness' and 'peace' are used to reinforce the idea that each point proves how appealing the chair is.

which is 'like water'. This last image leads me to believe that the speaker imagines that if he were to sit in the yellow chair he would be like someone swimming underwater, and much like such a swimmer, he would be close to but separated from the 'outside world'.

This 'outside world' seems like somewhere from which the poet would like to flee. He describes it as 'opening wide' and this conjures up an image of a greedy, devouring mouth opening wide. The poet seems to view the real world as a hostile place because, in the fourth stanza, he says that if he were to sit in the yellow chair he would be 'safe from harm'. He would also be 'safe from all surprise.' The repetition of the word 'safe' shows the importance the poet attaches to the chair as an imaginary place of sanctuary.

It is always a good idea to comment on the language in the poem. For example, in the second paragraph of this answer, the repetition of the word 'safe' is highlighted.

The idea of being able to see the 'outside world' but not having to be a part of it is, I feel, what the speaker particularly likes about the notion of sitting in the yellow chair. If he

were to escape into this world he would be in a better, more peaceful place. It would be the world of art and imagination and from there he would be able to see things from a different perspective. He would have 'crossed / the great divide.' Nothing would bother him as long as he stayed there. It is easy to see, when you look at it this way, why the poet says that he would 'love / to sit in the yellow chair in the painting'.

Sample Answer to Question 2:

The last three stanzas of this poem show the speaker's desire to escape from this world into a very different one. He believes that if he became immersed in the world of art, he would be in a better place and he would be able to look at the world in a new way. He uses his imagination to great effect to show us how we should broaden our minds through art.

The key word in this question is "explain". If you just paraphrase the last three stanzas, you will get a very low grade.

The speaker tells us that if he somehow managed to achieve his desire and become part of the painting, then he would be apart from "the outside world". He talks of a "great divide" between the real world and the world of art. The frame of the painting resembles a fence or a wall, separating him from the world and keeping him from harm. When I read this poem, I was struck by the description of the outside world opening wide, like a huge mouth that would devour the speaker, or like a void in which he would be lost forever. The idea of his feeling safer in the painting is reinforced by the words "so long". Everything would be alright "so long as I never / rose from / that yellow chair." If he did rise, then all this security and tranquillity would vanish.

As this is a fifteen-mark question, try to make three separate points. Give each point its own paragraph.

Make sure to support your points with quotation from the poem.

There is also a sense of the world of art allowing us to see our own world in a new way. There is an interesting reversal of the normal order of things in this poem. Usually, we look at paintings, but the speaker wants to become part of the painting, and to look out at the real world from a different perspective. I think he is saying that if we lose ourselves in art; if we allow ourselves to become totally absorbed by it, then we will have a new view of the world "Beyond the frame".

Personal response is appropriate here. You are required to explore the meaning behind the words and give your explanation of each stanza.

Finally, I believe that the last three stanzas show us how we should not be limited and unimaginative in our thinking. Paintings can offer us doorways into other worlds and open up all sorts of creative and imaginative options. We can lose ourselves in a work of art and in a world of art. We can stretch our minds and visualise ourselves as part of a painting, rather than just standing and admiring it in a practical, down-to-earth way.

Sample Answer to Question 3:

My favourite image in the poem is "a shadow lies / like a shy animal / in the corner". I like this simile because it seems to bring the painting to life. Others may look at the painting and see it as something inanimate and unchanging, but the speaker sees it as something real and vital. For him, the shadow in the corner is not simply paint on canvas; it is alive and may, like a shy animal, slip away at any moment.

The image also appeals to me because it seemed to give the poem a friendly feeling. Shadows can be frightening as they may hide dangers, but this shadow is like a "shy animal". Far from being a threat, it is portrayed as something timid and easily frightened. This rather sweet image adds to the welcoming, comforting atmosphere of the world of "the yellow chair". Having an animal curled up at your feet, or in the corner is relaxing and soothing, and the poet's decision to compare the shadow to a "shy animal" reinforces the notion of this magical place as being somewhere "safe from harm / safe from all surprise." It is a very positive image and very evocative of an idyllic place. I think this charming and unusual simile will stay with me for a long time to come.

Make sure to quote the image in full.

Define the image. It is a simile.

Use verbs to say what the image does: 'brings the painting to life', 'adds to the welcoming, comforting atmosphere', etc.

Comment: It can be difficult to write more than a couple of paragraphs on a question about one image. Don't write more just for the sake of it. Quality is more important than quantity, and if you ramble or introduce irrelevant points, you will lose marks.

Sample Answer 4 – 2002 SEC

The following poem by Michael Hartnett was written for his ten year old daughter, Lara.
Read the poem and then answer the questions which follow. (30)

Poem for Lara, 10

An ashtree on fire,
the hair of your head
coaxing larks
with your sweet voice
in the green grass,
a crowd of daisies
playing with you,
a crowd of rabbits
dancing with you,
the blackbird
with its gold bill
is a jewel for you,
the goldfinch
with its sweetness
is your music.
You are perfume,
you are honey,
a wild strawberry:
even the bees think you
a flower in the field.
Little queen of the land of books,
may you be always thus,
may you ever be free
from sorrow-chains.
Here's my blessing for you, girl,
it is no petty grace –
may you have your mother's soul
and the beauty of her face.



Answer **two** of the following questions. Each question is worth 15 marks.

1. From the imagery the poet uses, what impression of Lara do you get?
2. From your reading of the poem, what type of person do you think Michael Hartnett was?
3. Did you like or dislike this poem?
Give reasons for your answer based on evidence from the poem.

From the imagery the poet uses, what impression of Lara do you get?

- ✓ When you read this question, underline the words imagery and impression of Lara.
- ✓ As the question is on technique, you will need to use poetic terms.
- ✓ Each point you make will be supported by a quote and explained fully.
- ✓ The quotes should be short, there is no point in quoting lines and lines. A few words or a single line will usually suffice.
- ✓ Quote accurately, the poem is printed out for you so there is no excuse for spelling errors.
- ✓ Planning your answer:-
 - intro - pretty, well-loved*
 - red hair – vibrant, warm*
 - lover of and loved by nature*
 - loves books*
 - sweet – perfume, honey*

Sample Answer to Question 1:

This poem is rich in imagery which conveys a clear picture of the poet's daughter. The descriptions of her are very positive and leave me with the impression of a pretty, sweet, charming little girl.

In the opening lines we are given a physical description of Lara. The metaphor describing her hair as 'An ashtree on fire' tells us that she is a red-head. This image also

suggests warmth and vibrancy and links the little girl to nature by comparing her hair to a flaming tree.

This idea of Lara being somehow at one with nature is continued when the poet conjures up the image of flowers and rabbits joining in her fun: 'a crowd of daisies playing with you, a crowd of rabbits dancing with you'. Clearly, Lara loves nature and her father is suggesting that nature cannot help but love her back.

The positive imagery is carried right through the poem with references to Lara's 'sweet voice', 'the goldfinch with its sweetness is your music' and the metaphors which highlight her innocence and goodness, 'You are perfume, you are honey, a wild strawberry'. All the images chosen from nature are ones which are associated with children, which is most appropriate for a poem about a little girl; if she was a grown woman there would possibly be roses and swans mentioned, but as she is a ten year old, the poet chooses daisies, rabbits, strawberries and green grass instead.

It is interesting that the poet compares his daughter to a queen in 'the land of books'; this seems to set the seal on the little girl's perfection. Obviously a poet would value literature and reading and his choice of this image is significant as it tells us that Lara has another, deeper side to her – she is not just interested in the outdoors.

There is a suggestion in the poem that Lara is almost like a fairy, or at least a character from a fairytale. Her father fondly depicts her as dancing with rabbits, playing with daisies and even being loved by the insects: 'the bees think you a flower in the field'. These images conjure up the impression of a little girl who is naturally good and sweet and full of childlike innocence. It seems clear too that she is a happy little girl, her father hopes that she may 'be always thus, may you ever be free from sorrow-chains'.

Overall, my impression of Lara is that of a happy, carefree, sweet little girl who is idolised by her doting father.

Note: This answer is longer than necessary but it is no harm to see what could be written.



2. From your reading of the poem, what type of person do you think Michael Hartnett was?

- ✓ This question is looking for your impression of the poet, based on the language he uses, the images he chooses and the tone of the poem.
- ✓ Because you are asked what type of person the poet is, you should be careful to use words which describe personality.
- ✓ Remember, each of the questions is testing your ability to analyse poetry so show that you know how to do this. Don't be misled by the seeming simplicity of the questions.
- ✓ Planning your answer:- *loving father- caring- whimsical*

wants the best for his daughter

worries for her future

loving husband also – mention of mother

Sample Answer to Question 2:

I believe that Michael Hartnett is a very loving father. He idealises his daughter, portraying her as an almost ethereal (*not quite of this world*), fairylike creature who is part of nature's beauty. His descriptions of her are of a child who is perfectly attuned to nature and is loved by all the animals and even insects she encounters: 'daisies playing with you, a crowd of rabbits dancing with you'. This shows that he is a sensitive man who notices details that others may not, and also that he is a whimsical man – not many men would think of daisies playing with a child and rabbits dancing with her.

He is obviously someone who sees the best in everything. His description of his ten year old daughter is a caring, adoring one, he sees all that is good in her, 'You are perfume, you are honey, a wild strawberry'. As well as seeing the best in his daughter, the poet wants the best for her. He worries that her childish innocence will be destroyed and hopes that she will 'ever be free from sorrow chains'.

It is clear, from the final lines of the poem, that as well as being a loving father, Michael Hartnett is also a loving husband. In the last four lines, he wishes that his daughter may have all the blessings of her mother: 'may you have your mother's soul and the beauty of her face'. It is significant that he mentions the soul before physical beauty as this tells me that he is not a shallow person who is concerned only with the superficial. To him, clearly, spiritual beauty is the most important thing.

3. Did you like or dislike this poem? Give reasons for your answer based on evidence from the poem.

- ✓ I would strongly advise you to be positive here. You may, of course, say you dislike the poem but it will be much harder to support this answer by reference to the text. It is also important to remember that the poems chosen are generally thought to be good examples of their genre.
- ✓ Whichever approach you decide to take, it will need to be supported by evidence from the poem. A cursory, 'I disliked the poem, I thought it was boring' will not achieve a passing grade.
- ✓ Although the examiners want to see a personal response, they also want to see that it is based on a reasonably detailed analysis and evaluation of the poem.
- ✓ Planning your answer:- *things to consider - senses, language, sound, imagery*

Sample Answer to Question 3:

I enjoyed this poem very much. The theme of love is one I particularly like and it is pleasant to read such an uplifting poem in which a father extols (praises) his daughter's virtues. The images the poet uses to convey his adoration of his daughter are charming: they touch on almost all the senses. The picture I have in my mind is one of a little girl dancing in a sparkling, colourful meadow, filled with 'green grass', 'daisies', a blackbird with a 'gold bill' like a jewel and friendly rabbits and bees. The mention of perfume and honey appeals to my sense of smell and taste and helps to create an image of an almost perfect world. The description of the goldfinch singing sweetly completes the picture.

The whole poem seems to evoke a fairytale world in which Lara is a fairy queen in a magic kingdom, and the rabbits, larks, blackbirds, goldfinches, bees and even daisies do all they can to make her happy. They adore her: "Even the bees think you / a flower in the field." She is truly at one with nature. I enjoy this element of escapism in the poem; for a moment I am transported to the poet's perfect world and can see his beloved daughter through his eyes.

The part of the poem that I find most attractive, however, is the ending. I really like the way the poet mentions Lara's mother in such a loving way and hopes that the little girl will inherit her mother's beautiful soul as well as "the beauty of her face." This makes me think that the family unit is a close and happy one, and it ends the poem on a very positive note.