

Y11 Homework Booklet

Unseen Poetry



In GCSE Literature Paper 2 you will have to write answers on TWO poems you have never seen before. We call those poems “Unseen Poetry.”

There will be two questions. In the first question you will be asked to write about one poem (24 marks). In the second question you will be asked to compare that poem to another (8 marks).

So, 32 marks altogether; that makes 32 marks and about 20% of your GCSE Literature grade.



Question 1 (24 marks, 30 minutes)

The question will likely be as follows: **“In “Poem”, how does the poet present “X”?**

There are two ways you will be marked:

A01: Respond showing understanding, using selections/ examples from the poem.

A02: Explain how language, structure and form make meaning.

Advice for the first 10 minutes:

- 1- Read the question, title and any other information given—it may give you a “way in.”
- 2- Read the poem patiently and openly- it doesn't have to make sense.
- 3- Read it several times- what words/ feelings emerge?
- 4- Look again at the question- can you answer it in one sentence: The poet presents “X” as being.....
- 5- Now, read the poem again, annotating using WORDS F.I.R.S.T.
(Words, form, imagery, rhyme and rhythm, sound, tone) but identifying anything you like).

Writing your answer (20 minutes):

- 1- Start with a conceptualised overview:
“Throughout the poem, the poet presents “X” asby using methods such as imagery and alliteration.”
- 2- Then write 3 or more paragraphs, explaining how the poet has used language structure and form to present their view:
“In line 3 the poet uses a strange simile (“simile”) which makes us compare “X” to....
- 3- If you must do a conclusion, consider how the title and last line interplay...

Homework 1. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the question that follows.

Slow Reader

He can make sculptures
And fabulous machines
Invent games, tell jokes
Give solemn, adult advice
But he is slow to read.
When I take him on my knee
With his *Ladybird* book
He gazes into the air
Sighing and shaking his head
Like an old man
Who knows the mountains
Are impassable

He toys with words
Letting them grow cold
As gristly meat
Until I relent
And let him wriggle free-
A fish returning
To its element
Or a white-eyed colt
Shying from the bit
As if he sees
That if he takes it
In his mouth
He'll never run
Quite free again.

VICKI FEAVER

The poem "Slow Reader" is about a mother trying to get her son to read.

In the poem how does the poet present the boy's feelings about reading? (24 marks)

Homework 2. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the question that follows.

POEM FOR MY SISTER

My little sister likes to try my shoes,
to strut in them,
admire her spindle-thin twelve-year-old legs
in this season's styles.
She says they fit her perfectly,
but wobbles
on their high heels, they're
hard to balance.

I like to watch my little sister
playing hopscotch,
admire the neat hops-and-skips of her,
their quick peck,
never-missing their mark, not
over-stepping the line.
She is competent at peever*.

I try to warn my little sister
about unsuitable shoes,
point out my own distorted feet, the callouses,
odd patches of hard skin.
I should not like to see her
in my shoes.
I wish she could stay
sure footed,
sensibly shod.

Liz Lochhead

*hopscotch- a game played by jumping on a pavement.

In the poem how does the poet present the relationship between the sisters? (24 marks)

Homework 3. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the question that follows.

The Apple's Song

Tap me with your finger,
rub me with your sleeve,
hold me, sniff me, peel me
curling round and round
till I burst out white and cold
from my tight red coat
and tingle in your palm
as if I'd melt and breathe
a living pomander*
waiting for the minute
of joy when you lift me
to your mouth and crush me
and in taste and fragrance
I race through your head
in my dizzy dissolve.

I sit in the bowl
in my cool corner
and watch you as you pass
smoothing your apron.
Are you thirsty yet?
My eyes are shining.

Edwin Morgan

*A ball made of perfume.

In this poem, an apple in a fruit bowl speaks to whoever might be listening.

In the poem how does the poet present the apple? (24 marks)

Homework 4. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the question that follows.

Last Lesson of the Afternoon

When will the bell ring, and end this weariness?
How long have they tugged the leash, and strained apart,
My pack of unruly hounds! I cannot start
Them again on a quarry of knowledge they hate to hunt,
I can haul them and urge them no more.

No longer now can I endure the brunt
Of the books that lie out on the desks; a full threescore
Of several insults of blotted pages, and scrawl
Of slovenly work that they have offered me.
I am sick, and what on earth is the good of it all?
What good to them or me, I cannot see!

So, shall I take
My last dear fuel of life to heap on my soul
And kindle my will to a flame that shall consume
Their dross of indifference; and take the toll
Of their insults in punishment? — I will not! —

I will not waste my soul and my strength for this.
What do I care for all that they do amiss!
What is the point of this teaching of mine, and of this
Learning of theirs? It all goes down the same abyss.

What does it matter to me, if they can write
A description of a dog, or if they can't?
What is the point? To us both, it is all my aunt!
And yet I'm supposed to care, with all my might.

I do not, and will not; they won't and they don't; and that's all!
I shall keep my strength for myself; they can keep theirs as well.
Why should we beat our heads against the wall
Of each other? I shall sit and wait for the bell.

By D H Lawrence

In "Last Lesson of the Afternoon" the speaker is a teacher.

In the poem how does the poet present the experience of being a teacher? (24 marks)

Homework 5. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the questions that follows.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes are blood relations
They doze on the white ceiling
Like the children upstairs
While we wake below

We are their livelihood
They wish us no harm
Stealing through windows
With their fine instruments
And teething drone
There they say you hardly felt it

And they work like surgeons
While we stir in sleep
Tapping veins adjusting
The flow dim
Figures at work murmuring
Creatures of the subconscious
Extinct cloaked vampires
Spirits hooked on blood
Live scarlet drops
Hanging like fruit bats
From the ceiling — our babies
Our own flesh and blood
Loving us and jealous
Mmmmmm they cry at dusk
They are helpless without us.

David Campbell

In the poem how does the poet present the mosquito? (24 marks)

Homework 6. Using the advice above and the poem below, answer the questions that follows.

“Mosquito”

On the fine wire of her whine she walked,
Unseen in the ominous bedroom dark.
A traitor to her camouflage, she talked
A thirsty blue streak distinct as a spark.

I was to her a fragrant lake of blood
From which she had to sip a drop or die.
A reservoir, a lavish field of food,
I lay awake, unconscious of my size.

We seem fair-matched opponents. Soft she dropped
Down like a anchor on her thread of song.
Her nose sank thankfully in; then i slapped
At the sting on my arm, cunning and strong.

A cunning, strong Gargantua*. I struck
This lover pinned in the feast of my flesh,
Lulled by my blood, relaxed, half-sated, stuck
Engrossed in the gross rivers of myself.

Success! Without a cry the creature died,
Became a fleck of fluff upon the sheet.
The small welt of remorse subsides as side
By side we, murderer and murdered, sleep.

John Updike

*a fictional giant famous for his huge consumption of food and drink.

In the poem how does the poet present the mosquito? (24 marks)

You want it harder?

Here are some classic poems that may need a bit more thought. Have a go at the questions that follows.

“Mirror”

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful,
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Sylvia Plath

In the poem how does the poet present the mirror? (24 marks)

“Digging”

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner’s bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I’ll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney

In “Digging” the poet compares his own choice of work (writing) to his father’s (farming) .

In the poem how does the poet present his feelings about his father? (24 marks)

“The Thought Fox”

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox,
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

Ted Hughes

“The Thought-Fox” is often interpreted as being about the act of creative writing itself.

In the poem how does the poet present the act of creative writing? (24 marks)

“The Caged Bird”

The free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wings
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with fearful trill
of the things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou often write about the experience of slavery, physical and psychological.

In “Caged Bird” how does the poet present the expereicne of imprisonment? (24 marks)

“The Road Not Taken”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

“The Road Not Taken ” is often interpreted as being about the choices we make in life.

In the poem how does the poet present the choices we take... and don't take? (24 marks)

Above and beyond.

Research one of the following poets and make a collection of your own:

Robert Frost

Sylvia Plath

Edwin Morgan

Maya Angelou

Ted Hughes

Seamus Heaney.

From Springfield's Sonneteer of the Saloon, it's...

Moe's Poetry Corner

Special Summer Edition

Ode to a Ceiling Fan
What Don't Work Right

I look up with moldy old eyes
And see it taunting me.
Oh, ceiling fan.
Constant cool air flows from you.
Your circular motion is unending and complete.
Oh, ceiling fan.
I wish the wall switch weren't broke,
So's I could turn you off
And throw a noose up there.
You get the picture.
Oh, ceiling fan.
-M.S.

