

Unit 2 Section B Writing Tips

Writing about poetry: general guidelines for students

You will have to respond critically and imaginatively to one poetry anthology. You will be asked to compare and contrast two poems in the examination.

Analysing

When analysing a poem, you should consider the following.

- Look at the subject matter of the poem. What event, situation or experience does it feature?
- Does the poet have a purpose, a theme or a message? What is the poet conveying?
- What is the central mood or feeling of the poem? Does that mood change during the course of the poem? What response does the poet elicit from his/her reader?
- What are the poem's key features? What specific techniques has the poet used in the poem? This is a major part of your analysis (see Techniques).
- Summarise your analysis. What impact has the poem had on you? How successful is it? Do you think that it succeeds in its purpose, or if not, why has it failed?

Techniques

The following will help you to understand the major techniques of poetry, their effects, and how they achieve them.

- **Structure:** How is the poem structured? Does it have a conventional structure, for example, a sonnet or an ode?
- **Language:** How would you describe the poet's use of words? Are they vivid, striking, effective, drab, predictable or unusual? What part do they play in the poet's achievement?
- **Imagery:** Are there any striking examples of similes, metaphors, personification or symbols in the poem? What do they achieve?
- **Rhythm:** Does the poem have a regular rhythm, or is it fragmented? What is the effect of the poem's rhythmic qualities?
- **Sounds:** What sound features does the poet use? Is there onomatopoeia, alliteration, or assonance? Does the poem rhyme? What influences do these sound features have on the poem?

Comparing 2 poems

To successfully compare and contrast, you need to have a close understanding of the poems. It is a good idea to practice comparing and contrasting.

In the examination, use the prompts given in the question to focus your response. Consider the following when comparing and contrasting your two poems:

- the titles;
- the context of the poems;
- their perspectives;
- their form and poetic voice;
- the use made of imagery, language and structure;
- their mood and tone; and
- your preferences and conclusions. These can be referred to implicitly throughout and/or in your ending.