



Heworth Grange  
School

*Enriching Lives, Inspiring Ambitions*

# UNSEEN POETRY

Revision Booklet

### Top tips for approaching an unseen poem

#### Don't panic

The poem may well appear unfamiliar or difficult at first sight. It will be the same for everybody. Read it through twice without trying to understand everything. Read it again and make notes on anything you find interesting without at this stage worrying about what the question is asking you to focus on. Then go back to the question and make more specific notes alongside the poem.

#### Things to look out for:

<b>Repetition</b>	Repeated words, phrases or sounds - they will be significant
<b>Contrasts</b>	Slow/fast, hot/cold, light/dark, happy/sad, old/new, old/young and so on
<b>Beginnings and endings</b>	Especially endings, as this is where a poet may sum up or contradict the previous lines
<b>Punctuation and line breaks</b>	Usually a poem will be punctuated in the same way as prose but because of the line breaks, it is less noticeable. Look out for very short and very long sentences or a lack of sentences. Where a line breaks may or may not be significant; just be aware of them and anything that stands out, such as a single word or two on a line.
<b>The title</b>	It may be obvious as in 'Remember' or it may be an important guide to the poem, as in 'Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties'.

#### Voice/persona

Pay attention to the poet's voice. Who is the 'speaker' in the poem? Is it the poet or has she/he taken on a persona (i.e. speaking in the voice of a character?) In either case, who is being spoken to? Is it a general audience (you and me) or a particular person? Often a poet will write very personal poems and yet publish them for a general audience, for example, Elizabeth Barratt Browning's sonnets to Robert Browning.

The poem may contain **unfamiliar words**. Mostly these will be explained by the examiner but if others remain, you will almost always be able to work out their meaning or their gist through the context. Don't worry too much about them; you are not being tested on your knowledge of individual words.

### Technical terms

Make sure you know the most common terms such as metaphor, simile, alliteration and so on. But don't overdo their use. You will not get marks for saying 'black as death's pyjamas is a simile' (or a comparison, or figurative language). You will get marks for saying what its effect is or why it is important.

### Form and structure

The **form** of the poem is the way the poet has arranged it. This may be obvious in the case of a sonnet or another traditional verse form but it can be difficult to describe poems written in free form without a discernible pattern - except to say just that **if it is relevant**. For example, if the poem is written in a way which reflects conversation or colloquial speech, it may be relevant to note that 'the free form of the poem reflects ...etc.'

**Structure** is subtly different. It might be seen as the skeleton that lies beneath the outward form of the poem, or something even less solid, the muscles and tendons, perhaps. It can reflect the meaning of the poem more easily than the form. For example, in Keats' poem 'To Autumn', the form is a clear three-verse pattern with a regular rhyme and rhythm. The structure reflects the changing nature of autumn as it moves from warm harvest time through to chillier signs of coming winter.

### Words words words

Look out for **verbs, nouns and pronouns**. A quick underlining of the verbs in a poem can often reveal interesting things. They may tend to be very active as in 'Frost Fair', or calmer, more neutral as in 'Long Life'. Similarly with nouns: are there lots? Are they mainly concrete or abstract? Are they meant literally or figuratively? And finally, pronouns can say a lot too - see **voice and persona**.



### Tone or mood

This is one of the trickiest things to describe. Try, through practice, to build up a vocabulary of helpful words. If you are stuck, you can use phrases such as 'It feels as if the writer is ...' or 'the mood reminds me of ...'

### Sound

Because most poems are now read on the page we often overlook how they sound when read aloud. Try to read the poem aloud 'in your head' - it can be done! It will help you notice sound repetitions which may add to the poem's effect. Never write 'The poet has used assonance in the third line ...'; it doesn't add anything of interest. Instead try to write something like 'The assonance in the third line (especially the sound of ...) underlines the feeling of ....'

## Figurative language

This is a general term for comparisons, metaphors, similes and imagery. 'It felt like riding on the dome of St Pauls in an earthquake' is clearly figurative language, a comparison of one real thing (riding on the elephant) to something imagined. It happens to be a simile rather than a metaphor but do not labour over the difference - the important thing is to notice that it is figurative language and to comment on it, **if appropriate**, e.g. is it effective and why?

It is also useful to notice where a poet does not use figurative language. Elaine Feinstein, in 'Long Life', uses hardly any, relying on the description of actual things.

## Poetic terms you should know:

alliteration	assonance	blank verse	couplet
dramatic monologue	enjambment and end-stopped line	iambic pentameter	metaphor
onomatopoeia	personification	rhyme	simile
sonnet	stanza		



**'At the Draper's'** Thomas Hardy  
(1840-1928)

"I STOOD at the back of the shop, my dear,  
But you did not perceive me.  
Well, when they deliver what you were shown  
I shall know nothing of it, believe me!"

And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said,  
"O, I didn't see you come in there—  
Why couldn't you speak?"—"Well, I didn't. I left  
That you should not notice I'd been there.

"You were viewing some lovely things. '*Soon required  
For a widow, of latest fashion*';  
And I knew 'twould upset you to meet the man  
Who had to be cold and ashen

"And screwed in a box before they could dress you  
'*In the last new note in mourning,*'  
As they defined it. So, not to distress you,  
I left you to your adorning."

**Glossary:** *draper* - a shop which sold fabric and sewing items and often dresses also.

## First encounter

1. Read the poem through. Pause. Read it again. The words are spoken by a husband to his wife but it is not a usual love poem. Write it out as if it were prose. Here's how it could begin:

"I stood at the back of the shop, my dear, but you did not perceive me. Well, when they deliver what you were shown / shall know nothing of it, believe me!" And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said, "O, I didn't see you come in there—Why couldn't you speak?"  
'Well, ...

2. How does the fifth line of the poem give us a clue as to what the poem is about?

.....  
.....



3. Do you think the writer, Hardy, is the 'he' in the poem? Give your reasons.

.....  
.....



## Getting closer

The poem is like a story - or an extract from a story. In pairs, one of you write a brief summary of what might have happened before this extract and the other write a brief summary of what might happen afterwards. How do they compare?

**What happened before**

**What happened after**



4. What is the husband's tone of voice?



Choose one of the above or add your own. Explain your choice.

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### Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem has a very clear and formal structure. How does this reflect the theme of the poem?

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### The words on the page

1. Notice how these phrases are emphasised with double quotation marks:

“Soon required for a widow, of latest fashion;” and “In the latest new note in mourning,”.



What is their significance?

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.....



2. The poem is very restrained in its use of adjectives. In the third verse, though, there is an interesting contrast of adjectives. Pick out these adjectives and explain how they contrast with each other.

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.....  
.....  
.....



3. What do you think are the most important words in the poem. Why?



.....  
.....



## Inside the poem

1. **Imagery:** does the poem make use of figurative language (e.g. simile or metaphor)? If yes, describe where and with what effect. If no, why do you think this is so?

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.....  
.....



2. **Sound:** The poem is meant to be read as a piece of dialogue. How close do you think it is to actual speech, bearing in mind it was written roughly one hundred years ago?

.....  
.....  
.....



3. **Rhyme and rhythm:** The poem has a very definite pattern both in rhythm and rhyme. Some of the rhymes are unusual. Do the rhymes add to the effect of the poem or do they distract from it? Explain your thinking.

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.....



## A further encounter

1. 'At the Draper's' requires several readings. After you have read it a few times, think about these points and discuss your thoughts with a partner:
- The husband did not wish his wife to see him at the draper's so why does he now reveal it?
  - How is the wife portrayed?
  - How might the wife describe her visit to the draper's?

## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. What is your personal response to the poem?

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2. Does the poem work as a 'snapshot' of an event?

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## **'Remember'**

**Christina Rossetti**  
(1830-1894)

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

## First encounter

1. Read the poem through. Pause. Read it again.
2. Now read the first line and the last two lines. Sum up what you think the poem is about.

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.....  
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3. Do you think the writer of the poem, Rossetti, is also the 'I' in the poem? Why do you think that?

.....  
.....  
.....



4. Is the poem aimed at a general readership or a particular audience?

.....  
.....



## Getting closer to the poem

1. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Choose one of these descriptors or add your own and say why:

RESIGNED



Regretful

Emotional

.....  
.....  
.....



## Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem is written in a particular form, which you should recognise. If you do not, check with a partner and/or your teacher. In this form, there is often a change at about the ninth line so that the final lines offer a slight contrast to the first eight. What kind of change do you notice here?



.....  
.....



## The words on the page

1. Now look at the language the poet uses. Would you say the words used are generally familiar to you? If there are any words - such as 'vestige' - that are unfamiliar, see if you can work out the likely meaning from the context.
2. What repetition do you notice? Don't forget to look out for little words such as pronouns. What is the significance of this repetition?

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.....  
.....  
.....



3. What is the overall balance between nouns, verbs and adjectives? There is no need to count them, a general impression is enough and may give you an insight into the poet's approach.

.....  
.....  
.....



4. What do you think are the most important words in the poem apart from the ones that are repeated?

1 2 3 4

## Inside the poem

1. **Imagery:** What do you think is the effect of 'silent land' and 'darkness and corruption'? Overall, what would you say about Rossetti's use of imagery?

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.....  
.....



2. **Sound:** Is there a particular vowel sound that is more common than others? What, if any, would be the effect of this repetition?

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.....  
.....



3. **Rhyme and rhythm:** There is a very clear rhyme pattern and a rhythm to the poem. Do they, in your opinion, help or hinder an appreciation of the poem's message? Why?

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.....  
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## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. What is your personal response to the poem?

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‘At the Draper’s’ by Thomas Hardy and ‘Remember’ by Christina Rossetti  
Comparison resource

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This table gives you a template to help in a comparison of the poems of Rossetti and Hardy. Make notes around the poems. You may find it helpful to highlight or underline words and phrases in the poems and link them to a central note. Your notes can then be used as a basis for a fuller answer (see table on the next page).

**‘Remember’**

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann’d:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

**Christina Rossetti**

**‘At the Draper’s’**

“I STOOD at the back of the shop, my dear,  
But you did not perceive me.  
Well, when they deliver what you were shown  
I shall know nothing of it, believe me!”

And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said,  
“O, I didn’t see you come in there—  
Why couldn’t you speak?” — “Well, I didn’t. I left  
That you should not notice I’d been there.

“You were viewing some lovely things. ‘*Soon required  
For a widow, of latest fashion*’;  
And I knew ‘twould upset you to meet the man  
Who had to be cold and ashen

“And screwed in a box before they could dress you  
‘*In the last new note in mourning,*’  
As they defined it. So, not to distress you,  
I left you to your adorning.”

**Thomas Hardy**

‘At the Draper’s’ by Thomas Hardy and ‘Remember’ by Christina Rossetti  
Comparison resource

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While it is likely that Rossetti is writing personally, Hardy is ...	Hardy suggests the feelings of the husband by ...
Rossetti’s emotions are more ...	Both poems have a definite verse form. ‘Remember’ is a ...
Both writers use language which is ...	The use of imagery in the poems is ...
The use of ‘yet’ in ‘Remember’ indicates ... ( <i>Is there a change of emphasis in ‘At the Draper’s’?</i> )	Rossetti contrasts the present and the future, the physical and the abstract, e.g. ...
Hardy’s poem also contains contrasts ...	Overall, I think ...



## AQA exam style question

### Section C: Unseen poetry

Answer **both** questions in this section

#### At the Draper's

"I STOOD at the back of the shop, my dear,  
But you did not perceive me.  
Well, when they deliver what you were shown  
I shall know nothing of it, believe me!"

5 And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said,  
"O, I didn't see you come in there—  
Why couldn't you speak?"—"Well, I didn't. I left  
That you should not notice I'd been there.

10 "You were viewing some lovely things. 'Soon required  
*For a widow, of latest fashion*';  
And I knew 'twould upset you to meet the man  
Who had to be cold and ashen

"And screwed in a box before they could dress you  
'*In the last new note in mourning*,'  
15 As they defined it. So, not to distress you,  
I left you to your adorning."

Thomas Hardy

1. In 'At the Draper's', how does the poet presents the speaker's feelings about his wife?

[24 marks]

**Remember**

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

5 Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while  
10 And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

*Christina Rossetti*

2. In both 'At the Draper's' and 'Remember' the speakers describe how people deal with the prospect of death. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

[8 marks]



## 'Late Love'

Jackie Kay  
(b.1961)

How they strut about, people in love,  
how tall they grow, pleased with themselves,  
their hair, glossy, their skin shining.  
They don't remember who they have been.

How filmic they are just for this time.  
How important they've become - secret, above  
the order of things, the dreary mundane.  
Every church bell ringing, a fresh sign.

How dull the lot that are not in love.  
Their clothes shabby, their skin lustreless;  
how clueless they are, hair a mess; how they trudge  
up and down streets in the rain,

remembering one kiss in a dark alley,  
a touch in a changing-room, if lucky, a lovely wait  
for the phone to ring, maybe, baby.  
The past with its rush of velvet, its secret hush

already miles away, dimming now, in the late day.

**Glossary:** *mundane* - dull and routine.

## First encounter

1. What kind of person does the writer seem to be? (Someone who has never been in love? Someone once in love but no longer? Someone who finds the idea of 'being in love' foolish? Or... ?) Do you find the portrayal of people in love and not in love realistic?

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 .....  
 .....



2. Try to sum up how the poem depicts the two sorts of people *in your own words*.

Those who are in love are .....

.....



Those who are not in love are .....

.....



3. (Do you know someone who is 'in love'? Are they like that? And someone who is not 'in love?') Do you think the description of those who are not in love is actually the viewpoint of the writer or of those who are in love, looking down on those who are not?

## Getting closer to the poem

1. How would you describe the tone of the poem? These words might be helpful but feel free to add your own and to put them in order of how accurate they are, according to your views.



2. Pick out three words from the poem which describe each type of person:

Those who are in love:


Those who are not in love:

## Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem is clearly in two halves and the second half mirrors the first half in a number of ways. Pick out the similarities and differences between the two halves.

Stanzas one and two	Stanzas three and four
Similarities	
Begin with 'How ...'	Begin with 'How ...'
Differences	

## The words on the page

1. Pick out words and phrases which show that the writer is critical of 'people in love':

.....  
 .....



2. Pick out the key words in the third stanza which depict the people not in love in a negative way:

1		3	
	2		4

3. Read the poem leaving out the word 'How'. What difference does that make to the effect?

.....  
 .....



## Inside the poem

1. **Rhythm and sound:** The poem has no formal pattern of rhythm or rhyme and yet there is a sense of an underlying pattern. How regular are the lines and the stanzas (count the stressed syllables)? Can you detect rhymes or near rhymes?

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 .....



2. **Change of tone:** There is a clear change of direction between the second and third stanzas but there is also a change of tone between the third and fourth stanza. How is the fourth stanza different from the others?

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 .....



3. **The ending:** What do you make of the ending?

.....  
 .....



4. **The title:** Looking back now at the title, how well does it fit the poem?

.....

.....



## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. Is this a poem which perhaps speaks mainly to an older readership, to people who have 'seen it all', and 'been there, done that'? Or does it have a relevance to a younger reader?

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## 'Love and Friendship'

Emily Brontë

(1818-1848)

Love is like the wild rose-briar,  
Friendship like the holly-tree—  
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms  
But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,  
Its summer blossoms scent the air;  
Yet wait till winter comes again  
And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now  
And deck thee with the holly's sheen,  
That when December blights thy brow  
He still may leave thy garland green.

**Glossary:** *garland* - wreath.



## First encounter

1. Read the poem through twice then look again at the first two lines. What associations are conjured up by a wild rose and by holly? Jot down your thoughts and then compare them with those of a partner.

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## Getting closer to the poem

1. What does the writer tell us about a) the rose b) the holly?

The rose: .....

.....



The holly: .....

.....

2. Why does she consider the holly to be superior?

.....

.....



3. Discuss these statements about the message of the poem with a partner. Label them 1-6 in order, with 1 being the best description of the poem's message.

	Love and friendship are different and should not be confused
	Friendship is better than love
	Friendship is longer lasting than love
	Love is fragile but friendship is hardy
	Holly's beauty will outlast that of the wild rose
	Friendship can be relied upon but love cannot

**Structure - the way the poem is built**

1. The poem is a kind of argument, rather like a lawyer building a logical case. What are the stages in Brontë's argument? Look out for words which organise the argument, such as 'but', 'yet' and 'then'.

1

.....  
 .....

2

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3

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 .....

4

.....  
 .....

**The words on the page**

1. Brontë's diction is very simple. However, if the poem were to be written today, some of the words chosen might be different. Consider these words:



2. Find a word to replace each of them in the poem:

Yet wait till winter comes again

And who will call the wild-briar  ?

Then  the  rose-wreath now

And  thee with the holly's  ,

That when December  thy

He still may leave thy garland green.



## Inside the poem

1. The poem takes two plants and compares them throughout the poem to two emotions. Find out the term that is used to describe a comparison that is carried on throughout a poem (or for a substantial part of a poem).

.....



2. Another poetic technique is used in the last two lines.  
What is it?

.....  
.....



3. What kind of questions does Brontë ask?

.....  
.....



## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. Is Emily Brontë right? What experiences might have influenced her to come to her conclusion about love and friendship? Whether you agree with her or not, what is your response to the poem?

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## 'Late Love' by Jackie Kay and 'Love and Friendship' by Emily Brontë

## Comparison resource

'Late Love' and 'Love and Friendship': Use the table to make brief notes on similarities and differences between the poems.

'Late Love'	'Love and Friendship'
<p>How they strut about, people in love, how tall they grow, pleased with themselves, their hair, glossy, their skin shining. They don't remember who they have been.</p> <p>How filmic they are just for this time. How important they've become - secret, above the order of things, the dreary mundane. Every church bell ringing, a fresh sign.</p> <p>How dull the lot that are not in love. Their clothes shabby, their skin lustreless; how clueless they are, hair a mess; how they trudge up and down streets in the rain,</p> <p>remembering one kiss in a dark alley, a touch in a changing-room, if lucky, a lovely wait for the phone to ring, maybe, baby. The past with its rush of velvet, its secret hush</p> <p>already miles away, dimming now, in the late day.</p> <p><b>Jackie Kay</b></p>	<p>Love is like the wild rose-briar, Friendship like the holly-tree— The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms But which will bloom most constantly?</p> <p>The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring, Its summer blossoms scent the air; Yet wait till winter comes again And who will call the wild-briar fair?</p> <p>Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now And deck thee with the holly's sheen, That when December blights thy brow He still may leave thy garland green.</p> <p><b>Emily Brontë</b></p>

'Late Love' by Jackie Kay and 'Love and Friendship' by Emily Brontë  
Comparison resource

<b>First thoughts</b>  They are from different periods. ‘Love and Friendship’ is older because ...  The tone of ‘Love and Friendship is’ ...		<b>Form</b>  Both use a verse form which consists of ...	
<b>Structure</b>  ‘Late Love’ is in two parts, the first ...		<b>Language</b>  Both poems use simple language. Brontë’s use of verbs is restrained, e.g. ...	
<b>Imagery</b>  ‘Love and Friendship’ employs an extended metaphor which ...	<b>Themes</b>  As well as the theme of love, Brontë’s poem reflects a rural background, whereas ...  Both poems have a message. While Brontë conveys her views explicitly, Kay ...		<b>In conclusion ...</b>

## AQA exam style question

## Section C: Unseen poetry

Answer **both** questions in this section**Late Love**

How they strut about, people in love,  
 how tall they grow, pleased with themselves,  
 their hair, glossy, their skin shining.  
 They don't remember who they have been.

- 5 How filmic they are just for this time.  
 How important they've become - secret, above  
 the order of things, the dreary mundane.  
 Every church bell ringing, a fresh sign.

- 10 How dull the lot that are not in love.  
 Their clothes shabby, their skin lustreless;  
 how clueless they are, hair a mess; how they trudge  
 up and down streets in the rain,

- 15 remembering one kiss in a dark alley,  
 a touch in a changing-room, if lucky, a lovely wait  
 for the phone to ring, maybe, baby.  
 The past with its rush of velvet, its secret hush

already miles away, dimming now, in the late day.

Jackie Kay

1. In 'Late Love', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about people who are in love?

[24 marks]

**Love and Friendship**

Love is like the wild rose-briar,  
Friendship like the holly-tree—  
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms  
But which will bloom most constantly?

- 5     The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,  
      Its summer blossoms scent the air;  
      Yet wait till winter comes again  
      And who will call the wild-briar fair?

- 10    Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now  
      And deck thee with the holly's sheen,  
      That when December blights thy brow  
      He still may leave thy garland green.

Emily Brontë

2. In both 'Late Love' and 'Love and Friendship' the speakers describe feelings of being in love. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

[8 marks]



## **'Finding the keys'**

**Robin Robertson**

*(b. 1955)*

The set seed and the first bulbs showing.  
The silence that brings the deer.  
The trees are full of handles and hinges;  
you can make out keyholes, latches in the leaves.  
Buds tick and crack in the sun, break open  
slowly in a spur of green.

\*

The small-change colours of the river bed:  
these stones of copper, silver, gold.  
The rock-rose in the waste-ground  
finding some way to bloom. The long  
spill of birdsong. Flowers, all  
turned to face the hot sky. Nothing stirs.

That woody clack of antlers.  
In yellow and red, the many griefs of autumn.  
The dawn light through amber leaves  
and the trees are lanterned, blown  
the next day to empty stars.  
Smoke in the air; the air, turning.

\*

Under a sky of stone and pink  
faring in from the north and promising snow:  
the blackbird.  
In his beak, a victory of worms.

The winged seed of the maple,  
the lost keys under the ash.



## First encounters

1. What is the first thing you notice about the poem?

.....

.....



2. Read the poem again, if possible aloud. In an exam you won't be able to do this so practise hearing it 'in your head', saying the words to yourself very carefully.

3. Ignore the title. What title would you give the poem? Why?

.....





.....

.....



## Getting closer to the poem

1. Each section of the poem contains a series of brief descriptions, like snapshots. They comprise both sights and sounds. In each section, which of these conjures up the season best?

		Sights	Sounds	
Spring		set seed and bulbs twigs and branches green buds	silence buds tick and crack	The green buds spur of green sums up spring best
Summer				
Autumn				
Winter				

## Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The writer has neatly divided the poem into four parts, representing the four seasons. In pairs, draw or find four images that represent the different seasons. Now allocate the four sections of the poem to the correct season. What ways are the four parts linked? (Look for things which are mentioned in one part and referred to again later.)

<p>The set seed and the first bulbs showing. The silence that brings the deer.</p> <p>The trees are full of handles and hinges; you can make out keyholes, latches in the leaves.</p> <p>Buds tick and crack in the sun, break open slowly in a spur of green.</p>	<p>The small-change colours of the river bed: these stones of copper, silver, gold.</p> <p>The rock-rose in the waste-ground finding some way to bloom. The long spill of birdsong. Flowers, all turned to face the hot sky. Nothing stirs.</p>
<p>That woody clack of antlers. In yellow and red, the many griefs of autumn.</p> <p>The dawn light through amber leaves and the trees are lanterned, blown</p> <p>the next day to empty stars. Smoke in the air; the air, turning.</p>	<p>Under a sky of stone and pink faring in from the north and promising snow:</p> <p>the blackbird. In his beak, a victory of worms.</p> <p>The winged seed of the maple, the lost keys under the ash.</p>

## The words on the page

1. The language of the poem is mostly straightforward but there are some words which might need some extra thought. It may not be the words themselves that are difficult but the way in which they are used, for example: small-change colours / spill of birdsong / griefs of autumn / trees are lanterned / victory of worms.
2. You may not be sure, but jot down some suggestions of what the poet is getting at with these phrases. When you have completed the table share your ideas with a partner. Did they have similar suggestions to you?

small-change colours	
a spill of birdsong	
the griefs of autumn	
the trees are lanterned	Lanterns give out light - not always very bright - perhaps the light is just struggling to come through the leaves ...
a victory of worms	

## Inside the poem

### 1. Think about:

- a. The way the poem is punctuated. What effect does this have?

.....  
 .....



- b. Read the poem aloud to a partner. Every time you come across an example of onomatopoeia or alliteration try to emphasise this.

### 2. Sound: What effect do the sounds of the words in the poem have?

Where do you notice this most?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....



3. **Imagery:** You have seen that the writer uses unusual phrases and there are other interesting images in the poem: 'keyholes', 'hinges' and so on. Select two or three examples and comment on how effective they are.

.....

.....

.....

.....



### Thoughts, response, conclusion...

1. What do you think is the significance of 'keys' in the poem?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



2. Does this poem evoke the seasons for you? If not, why not? Write two or three sentences in answer to this.

.....

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.....





## 'October'

Robert Frost  
(1874-1963)

O hushed October morning mild,  
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,  
Should waste them all.  
The crows above the forest call;  
Tomorrow they may form and go.  
O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief.  
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,  
Beguile us in the way you know.  
Release one leaf at break of day;  
At noon release another leaf;  
One from our trees, one far away.  
Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.  
Slow, slow!  
For the grapes' sake, if they were all,  
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,  
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost —  
For the grapes' sake along the wall.

**Glossary:**    *beguile* - to charm or enchant.  
                  *amethyst* - a gem with a purple colouring


## First encounter

1. Read the poem through and then read it again, pausing for a few seconds at each full stop. At each pause, think of a word that describes the mood of the sentence you've just read. When you've read the poem, choose three words that sum up the overall mood.


1

2


3



2. There is a hint or echo of a hymn or prayer in the poem, especially in the first half. Which words convey that impression?




3. What is the focus of Frost's plea to October?




## Getting closer to the poem

1. At line 7 the poet begins a whole list of imperatives - i.e. words which ask or command. Working with a partner, go through the poem highlighting these command words or phrases then write them below:

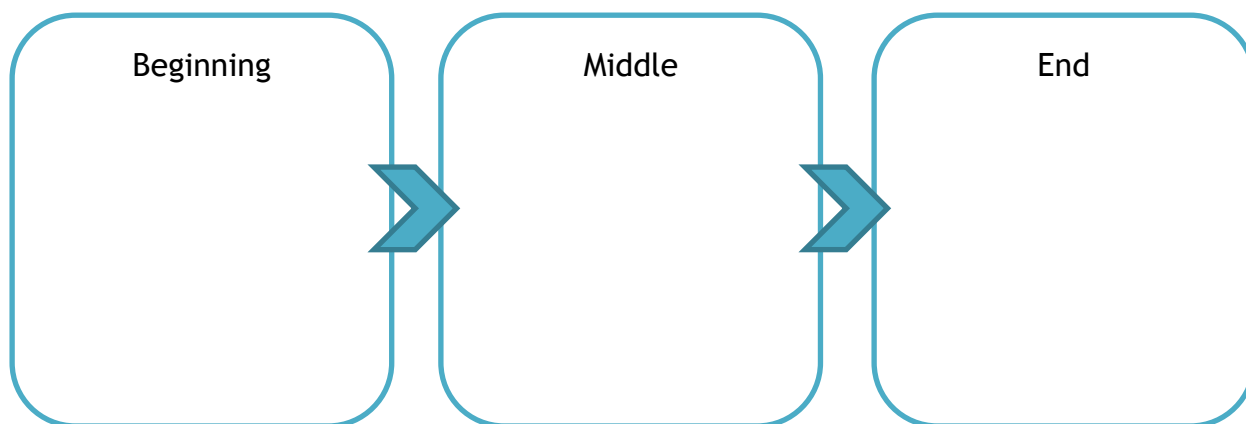


2. Is there any way in which these requests could be granted?



## Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem has a very definite beginning, middle and end. In pairs, one of you sums up what the beginning is about. The other should sum up what the middle is about. Compare your thoughts, then together sum up what the ending is about.



## The words on the page

1. Frost is very restrained in his use of adjectives. How many can you spot? Read through the poem with a partner and take it in turns to spot the adjectives. What kinds of words are more important in his poem? Why?

.....  
 .....



2. How important a part does repetition play in the poem?

.....  
 .....



## Inside the poem

1. How would you describe the rhyme and rhythm of the poem?

.....  
 .....



2. How far does the rhyme and rhythm reflect the mood of the poem?

.....  
 .....



3. What is the effect of the interruption of 'Slow, slow!'?

.....  
.....



4. Which vowel sounds tend to dominate the poem? What effect does that have?

.....  
.....



### Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. What is your reaction to the poem? Does it reflect your thoughts about autumn or does it seem to describe somewhere that is very different from your experiences?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....





## 'Finding the Keys' by Robin Robertson and 'October' by Robert Frost

## Comparison resource

Remember when you compare poems bear in mind the following features:

- The 'voice' of the poet - the tone, the approach or persona of the poet.
- Language - the vocabulary used by the poet ,repetitions, person and tense , grammar
- Techniques - imagery, sound effects, rhyme and rhythm
- Structure - verse form and variations, the 'direction' of the poem

## Task

**Compare the two poets' descriptions of nature and the passing of time.**

Before you start, use one highlighter to mark the similarities in the poem and another highlighter to mark the differences, focusing on the comparison points above.

'October'	'Finding the Keys'
<p>O hushed October morning mild,          Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  <i>Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,          Should waste them all.</i>          The <u>crows</u> above the forest call;          Tomorrow they may form and go.          O hushed October morning mild,          Begin the hours of this day slow.          Make the day seem to us less brief.          Hearts not averse to being beguiled,          Beguile us in the way you know.          Release one leaf at break of day;          At noon release another leaf;          One from our trees, one far away.          Retard the sun with gentle mist;          Enchant the land with amethyst.          Slow, slow!          For the grapes' sake, if they were all,          Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,          Whose clustered fruit must else be lost —          For the grapes' sake along the wall.</p> <p>Robert Frost</p>	<p>The set seed and the first bulbs showing.          The silence that brings the deer.          The trees are full of handles and hinges;          you can make out keyholes, latches in the leaves.          Buds tick and crack in the sun, break open          slowly in a spur of green.</p> <p>The small-change colours of the river bed:          these stones of copper, silver, gold.          The rock-rose in the waste-ground          finding some way to bloom. The long          spill of birdsong. Flowers, all          turned to face the hot sky. Nothing stirs.</p> <p>That woody clack of antlers.          In yellow and red, the many griefs of autumn.          The dawn light through amber leaves          and the trees are lanterned, blown          the next day to empty stars.          Smoke in the air; the air, turning.</p> <p>Under a sky of stone and pink          faring in from the north and promising snow:          the blackbird.          In his beak, a victory of worms.          The winged seed of the maple,          the lost keys under the ash.</p> <p>Robin Robertson</p>

*Compare the two poets' descriptions of nature and the passing of time.*

## 'Finding the Keys' by Robin Robertson and 'October' by Robert Frost

## Comparison resource

## To the teacher

Provide the two poems side by side and ask students to use highlighters or some other means of marking the text in order to show similarities and pick out differences. In the example below, the grey highlighting marks similarities to do with slowness and quiet. Together with italics it marks the mention of the wind's effect on the leaves and with underline, the two mentions of birds. The blue highlighting picks out some of the differences, explained underneath the table.

'October'	'Finding the Keys'
<p>O <b>hushed</b> October morning <b>mild</b>,          Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  <i>Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,</i>  <i>Should waste them all.</i>          The <b>crows</b> above the forest call;          Tomorrow they may form and go.          O <b>hushed</b> October morning <b>mild</b>,          Begin the hours of this day <b>slow</b>.          Make the day seem to us <b>less brief</b>.          Hearts not averse to being beguiled,  <b>Beguile us</b> in the way you know.  <b>Release</b> one leaf at break of day;          At noon <b>release</b> another leaf;          One from our trees, one far away.  <b>Retard the sun</b> with <b>gentle</b> mist;  <b>Enchant</b> the land with <b>amethyst</b>.  <b>Slow, slow!</b>          For the grapes' sake, if they were all,          Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,          Whose clustered fruit must else be lost –  <b>For the grapes' sake</b> along the wall.</p>	<p>The set seed and the first bulbs showing.          The <b>silence</b> that brings the <b>deer</b>.          The trees are full of handles and hinges;          you can make out keyholes, latches in the leaves.          Buds <b>tick and crack</b> in the sun, break open  <b>slowly</b> in a spur of <b>green</b>.          *          The small-change colours of the river bed:          these stones of <b>copper, silver, gold</b>.          The rock-rose in the waste-ground          finding some way to bloom. The <b>long</b>  <b>spill</b> of birdsong. Flowers, all          turned to face the hot sky. <b>Nothing stirs</b>.          *          That woody <b>clack</b> of <b>antlers</b>.          In <b>yellow and red</b>, the many griefs of          autumn.          The dawn light through <b>amber</b> leaves          and the trees are lanterned, <b>blown</b>  <b>the next day</b> to empty stars.  <b>Smoke</b> in the air; the air, turning.          *          Under a sky of <b>stone and pink</b>          faring in from the north and promising          snow: the <b>blackbird</b>.          In his beak, a victory of worms.          The winged seed of the maple,          the lost keys under the ash.</p>

## AQA exam style question

## Section C: Unseen poetry

Answer **both** questions in this section**Finding the keys**

The set seed and the first bulbs showing.  
 The silence that brings the deer.  
 The trees are full of handles and hinges;  
 you can make out keyholes, latches in the leaves.

5 Buds tick and crack in the sun, break open  
 slowly in a spur of green.

\*

The small-change colours of the river bed:  
 these stones of copper, silver, gold.

10 The rock-rose in the waste-ground  
 finding some way to bloom. The long  
 spill of birdsong. Flowers, all  
 turned to face the hot sky. Nothing stirs.

\*

That woody clack of antlers.  
 In yellow and red, the many griefs of autumn.

15 The dawn light through amber leaves  
 and the trees are lanterned, blown  
 the next day to empty stars.  
 Smoke in the air; the air, turning.

\*

20 Under a sky of stone and pink  
 faring in from the north and promising snow:  
 the blackbird.  
 In his beak, a victory of worms.  
 The winged seed of the maple,  
 the lost keys under the ash.

*Robin Robertson*

1. In 'Finding the Keys', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about nature?

**[24 marks]**

**October**

O hushed October morning mild,  
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,  
Should waste them all.  
The crows above the forest call;  
Tomorrow they may form and go.

5 O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief.  
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,  
Beguile us in the way you know.  
Release one leaf at break of day;

10 At noon release another leaf;  
One from our trees, one far away.  
Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.  
Slow, slow!  
For the grapes' sake, if they were all,  
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,  
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost –  
For the grapes' sake along the wall.

*Robert Frost*

2. In both 'Finding the Keys' and 'October' the speakers describe feelings about nature and the passing of time. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

**[8 marks]**

## 'October' by Robert Frost and 'The Bluebell' by Anne Brontë

Exam questions

---

**October**

O hushed October morning mild,  
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,  
Should waste them all.  
The crows above the forest call;  
Tomorrow they may form and go.  
O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief.  
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,  
Beguile us in the way you know.  
Release one leaf at break of day;  
At noon release another leaf;  
One from our trees, one far away.  
Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.  
Slow, slow!  
For the grapes' sake, if they were all,  
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,  
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost –  
For the grapes' sake along the wall.

*Robert Frost*

---



## 'Calling Card'

Tracey Herd  
(b.1968)

At the last party,  
the punctual, the late arrivals,  
the ones who never made it  
are all one and the same.

Girl in the vivid, yellow peacoat,  
with hands tucked into your sleeves,  
bangles upon bangles; only  
in a photograph, could you be silent.

Your life comprised 8,252 sunrises  
and one less sunset.  
You are at the top of your  
radio tower, speaking  
out into the universe.  
Your words, considered and private  
will travel outwards forever  
*... thoughts that wander  
through eternity ...*

The car hit the guard rail,  
Dennis, Mass, on Route 6,  
with your boyfriend asleep at the wheel,  
prosaic details you'd have discarded.  
They meant nothing, just  
a mess of metal and broken glass.  
Your words couldn't protect you,  
but they never left you,  
swirling around your body like moths.

It's us they'll haunt, bearing  
their bright, yellow buds.  
I'll never be able to look at  
a yellow rose again  
without thinking of you.

Your ashes were scattered  
against the wind, your body  
burned into charred scraps  
of paper, random phrases,  
all we are in the end.  
But you, you were rare. Your words  
are up there with the stars,  
still travelling outwards  
with the occasional earthbound sigh.

## First encounter

1. Read the poem through and then read it again, aloud.

What are your first impressions?

.....  
.....  
.....



2. This is a 'eulogy' (something written in praise of someone who has died). How well did the poet know Marina Keegan? Base your response on the information in the poem.

.....  
.....  
.....



## Getting closer to the poem

1. The title is never referred to in the poem. What is a calling card and how much information does one tend to contain? Why has Herd given that title to this poem?

.....  
.....  
.....



## Structure

1. The poem is divided into stanzas of unequal length. Each one is like a paragraph, each introducing a slightly different topic. What is each one about? With a partner, take it in turns to sum up what each stanza is about. Then complete the following table.



<b>Stanza 1</b>	Seems separate from the others - a generalisation (about death?) and not about Marina specifically.
<b>2</b>	Introduces Marina. She ...
<b>3</b>	
<b>4</b>	
<b>5</b>	
<b>6</b>	

2. There is also a vaguely chronological movement through the poem: before the accident, the accident, after the accident. Could the first stanza fit equally well at the end of the poem?

## The words on the page

1. Herd's eulogy is equally concerned with Marina Keegan's words as with her body. Make two lists of quotes under those two headings. Where does 'Your life' fit?

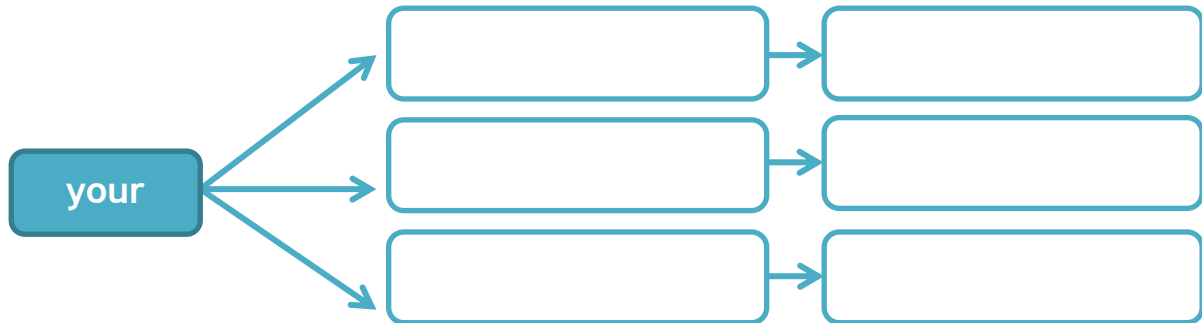
Body	Words

2. The second stanza gives us a snapshot of Marina. What can we deduce about her from this small vignette?

.....  
.....



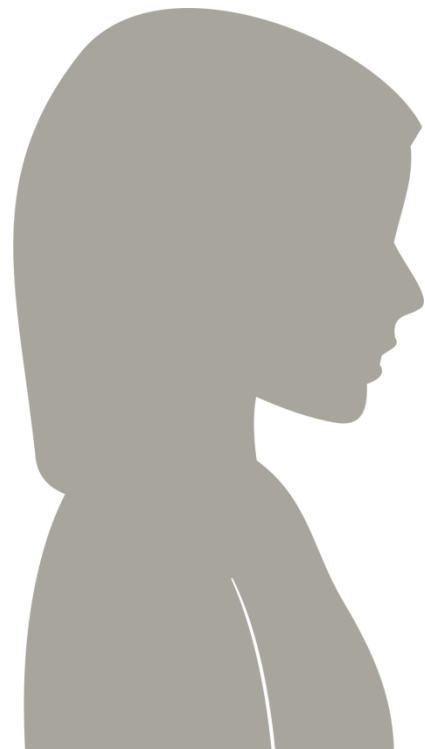
3. Look at the repetition of 'your' and make a note of the words which follow it. Repetition is always worth investigating. Are there other significant repetitions?



4. In the third stanza, Herd mentions the sunrises, sunsets and the universe. Make a note of other words and phrases which have similar connotations.

1	2	3
4	5	

5. 'Only in a photograph could you be silent'. Make a note of other words and phrases which refer to Marina's liveliness, her talkativeness.



## Inside the poem

1. Make a note of the images Herd uses which are connected with words. Which are the most effective, in your opinion? Give your reasons.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



2. Read through the poem again, noticing how many words and phrases seem to create images of scattering, of movement. Is there anything that is still?

.....

.....



3. In a poem of this length, it is impossible to discuss everything. Often the exam question will give you a focus. If not, decide to concentrate on a particular theme. Here are some possibilities:

the power of words

the contrast between the  
prosaic and the unusual

coming to terms with the  
death of a young person

Jot down some notes for a paragraph or two on one of these themes.

.....

.....

.....

.....



## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. Although this is a personal eulogy, does it have an impact on you - or is it just like a media report on an accident?

.....

.....

.....

.....





**'For Meg'**  
**Fleur Adcock**  
(b. 1934)

Half the things you did were too scary for me.  
Skiing? No thanks. Riding? I've never learnt.  
Canoeing? I'd be sure to tip myself out  
and stagger home, ignominiously wet.  
It was my son, that time in Kathmandu,  
who galloped off with you to the temple at Bodnath  
in a monsoon downpour, both of you on horses  
from the King of Nepal's stables. Not me.

And as for the elephants - my God, the elephants!  
How did you get me up on to one of those?  
First they lay down; the way to climb aboard  
was to walk up a gross leg, then straddle a sack  
(that's all there was to sit on), while the creature  
wobbled and swayed through the jungle for slow hours.  
It felt like riding on the dome of St Paul's  
in an earthquake. This was supposed to be a treat.

You and Alex and Maya, in her best sari,  
sat beaming at the wildlife, you with your camera  
proficiently clicking. You were pregnant at the time.  
I clung with both hot hands to the bit of rope  
that was all there was to cling to. The jungle steamed.  
As soon as we were back in sight of the camp  
I got off and walked through a river to reach it.  
You laughed, but kindly. We couldn't all be like you.

Now you've done the scariest thing there is;  
and all the king's horses, dear Meg, won't bring you back.

---

## First encounter

1. Read the poem to yourself and then read it aloud or listen to someone reading it to you. What impression do you get of the writer?

The writer seems to be .....

.....



2. A poem written in memory of someone is clearly going to be personal, so we know that Adcock is the 'speaker' - i.e. she has not taken on the persona of another character. But who is she addressing?

.....

.....



## Getting closer to the poem

1. What is the tone or mood of the poem?

.....

.....



2. Imagine the writer is talking about Meg to someone who didn't know her. Which two words from the following list might she use to describe her?



Explain your choices:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



## Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem moves through a series of stages. What is each one about?

The first 4 lines	
Lines 5-8	
Lines 9 - 24	
The final 2 lines	

2. Three things to think about:

- 1 You will notice that the poem builds to a climax and then ends quite suddenly. Does that seem satisfactory - or does it leave you wanting more?
- 2 The poem is presented in stanzas of the same length (apart from the closing two) and in lines of similar length. Why do you think the writer has chosen to end the lines where she does?
- 3 What do you notice about the end of each of the three long stanzas?

## The words on the page

1. The language of the poem is mainly straightforward. If there are any words which are unclear to you, try to work out the meaning from the context. 'Ignominiously' and 'proficiently' are two of the more complex words. Interestingly they underline a contrast between the writer and Meg. How would you describe that contrast?

The writer is .....whereas Meg is .....



2. Look at the verbs in the poem. Pick out three that you think are particularly important and say why.

1	2	3
---	---	---



## Inside the poem

1. There is a lot of description in the poem but only one use of imagery, a striking simile.

What is it and how effective is it?

.....

.....



2. The final lines of a poem are usually important. In this poem they are additionally emphasised by being set on their own. Make a note of anything you find interesting or significant in the two lines.

.....

.....



## Thoughts, response, conclusions

1. Your reaction to the poem:

a. How far does it give you a picture of what Meg was like?

.....

.....



b. Is this a sad poem?

.....

.....



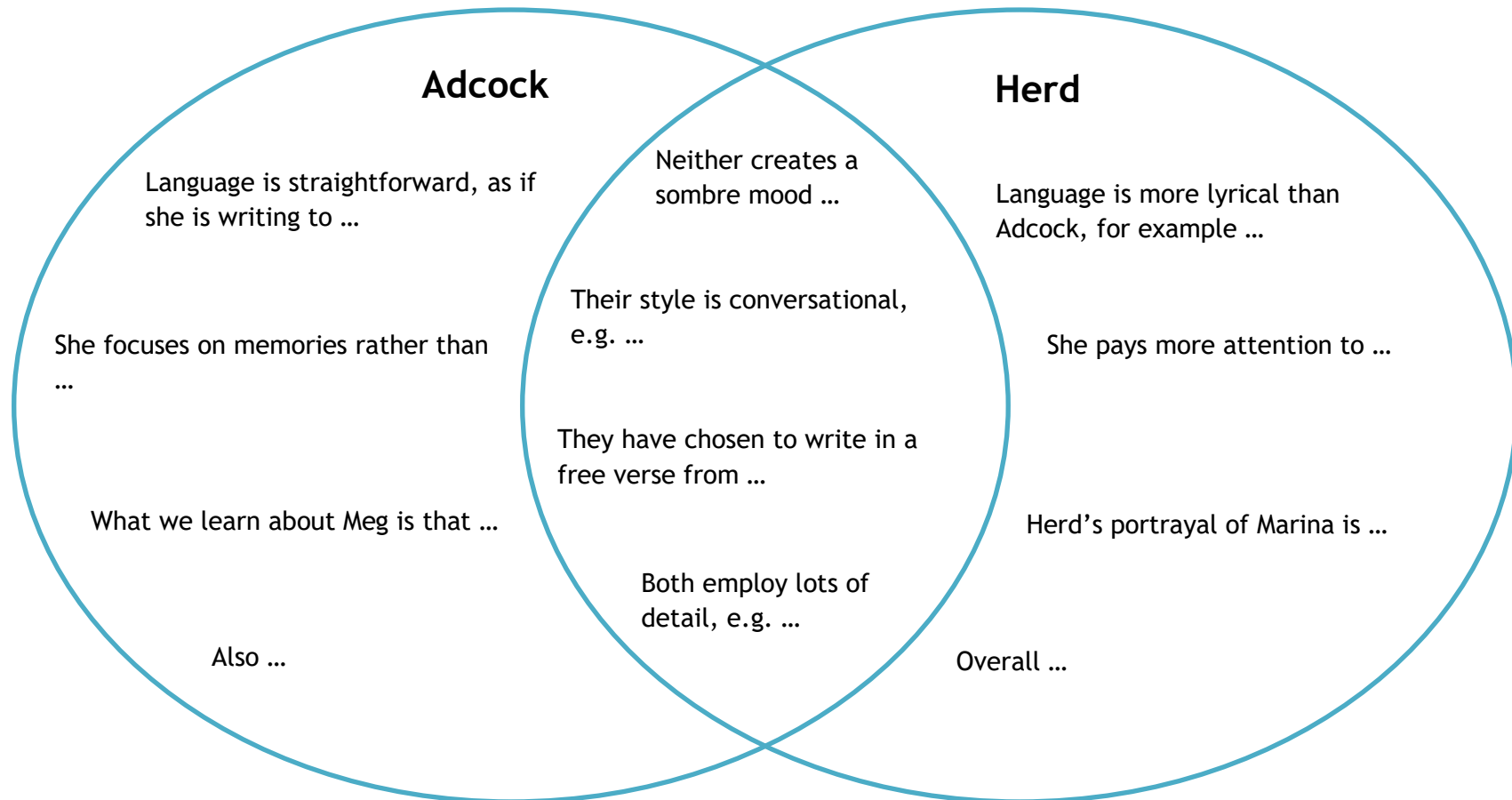
## 'Calling Card' by Tracey Herd and 'For Meg' by Fleur Adcock

### Comparison resource

---

Adcock and Herd have each written poems in memory of someone they knew. Explore the ways in which they express their feelings for that person. How effectively do they portray Meg and Marina?

Here is one way of organising your thoughts.



You will need to add a conclusion. It could be along the lines of: 'Although their styles are similar, the two poems are very different in the way they portray the dead person. Firstly ... '

---



## AQA exam style question

### Section C: Unseen poetry

Answer **both** questions in this section

#### Calling Card

At the last party,  
the punctual, the late arrivals,  
the ones who never made it  
are all one and the same.

5 Girl in the vivid, yellow peacoat,  
with hands tucked into your sleeves,  
bangles upon bangles; only  
in a photograph, could you be silent.

10 Your life comprised 8,252 sunrises  
and one less sunset.  
You are at the top of your  
radio tower, speaking  
out into the universe.

15 Your words, considered and private  
will travel outwards forever  
*... thoughts that wander  
through eternity ...*

The car hit the guard rail,  
20 Dennis, Mass, on Route 6,  
with your boyfriend asleep at the wheel,  
prosaic details you'd have discarded.  
They meant nothing, just  
a mess of metal and broken glass.

25 Your words couldn't protect you,  
but they never left you,  
swirling around your body like moths.

It's us they'll haunt, bearing  
their bright, yellow buds.  
I'll never be able to look at  
**30** a yellow rose again  
without thinking of you.

Your ashes were scattered  
against the wind, your body  
**35** burned into charred scraps  
of paper, random phrases,  
all we are in the end.  
But you, you were rare. Your words  
are up there with the stars,  
**40** still travelling outwards  
with the occasional earthbound sigh.

*Tracey Herd*

1. In 'Calling Card', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about the girl at the party?

[24 marks]

---

**For Meg**

Half the things you did were too scary for me.

Skiing? No thanks. Riding? I've never learnt.

Canoing? I'd be sure to tip myself out  
and stagger home, ignominiously wet.

5 It was my son, that time in Kathmandu,  
who galloped off with you to the temple at Bodnath  
in a monsoon downpour, both of you on horses  
from the King of Nepal's stables. Not me.

10 And as for the elephants - my God, the elephants!  
How did you get me up on to one of those?  
First they lay down; the way to climb aboard  
was to walk up a gross leg, then straddle a sack  
(that's all there was to sit on), while the creature  
15 wobbled and swayed through the jungle for slow hours.  
It felt like riding on the dome of St Paul's  
in an earthquake. This was supposed to be a treat.

You and Alex and Maya, in her best sari,  
20 sat beaming at the wildlife, you with your camera  
proficiently clicking. You were pregnant at the time.  
I clung with both hot hands to the bit of rope  
that was all there was to cling to. The jungle steamed.  
As soon as we were back in sight of the camp  
25 I got off and walked through a river to reach it.  
You laughed, but kindly. We couldn't all be like you.

Now you've done the scariest thing there is;  
and all the king's horses, dear Meg, won't bring you back.

*Fleur Adcock*

2. In both 'Calling Card' and 'For Meg' the speakers describe feelings about someone that has died. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

**[8 marks]**

**SECTION B, Part 2 - Unseen Poetry**

**Read the two poems and answer the question.**

**You should spend about 45 minutes on this section.**

***Calling Card***

At the last party,  
the punctual, the late arrivals,  
the ones who never made it  
are all one and the same.

Girl in the vivid, yellow peacoat, 5  
with hands tucked into your sleeves,  
bangles upon bangles; only  
in a photograph, could you be silent.

Your life comprised 8,252 sunrises  
and one less sunset. 10  
You are at the top of your  
radio tower, speaking  
out into the universe.  
Your words, considered and private  
will travel outwards forever 15  
*... thoughts that wander*  
*through eternity ...*

The car hit the guard rail,  
Dennis, Mass, on Route 6,  
with your boyfriend asleep at the wheel, 20  
prosaic details you'd have discarded.  
They meant nothing, just  
a mess of metal and broken glass.  
Your words couldn't protect you,  
but they never left you, 25



**'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am'**

**Amy Lowell**  
(1874-1925)

They have watered the street,  
It shines in the glare of lamps,  
Cold, white lamps,  
And lies  
Like a slow-moving river,  
Barred with silver and black.  
Cabs go down it,  
One,  
And then another,  
Between them I hear the shuffling of feet.  
Tramps doze on the window-ledges,  
Night-walkers pass along the sidewalks.  
The city is squalid and sinister,  
With the silver-barred street in the midst,  
Slow-moving,  
A river leading nowhere.

---

Opposite my window,  
The moon cuts,  
Clear and round,  
Through the plum-coloured night.  
She cannot light the city;  
It is too bright.  
It has white lamps,  
And glitters coldly.

I stand in the window and watch the moon.  
She is thin and lustreless,  
But I love her.  
I know the moon,  
And this is an alien city.

**Glossary:** *alien* - unfamiliar.

---

## First encounter

1. Where do you think the writer comes from? What are her feelings about the city? Do you think they would be the same at 2 o'clock in the afternoon?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



2. Write a short paragraph to sum up the mood of the poem. Condense the paragraph to a sentence then finally a single word.

### Paragraph

.....

.....

.....

.....



### Sentence

.....



### Word

## Getting closer to the poem

1. Sometimes the poet's negative feelings are directly expressed, e.g. 'The city is squalid and sinister'. Elsewhere the negativity is more indirect. Highlight the words or phrases which, to you, express negative feelings. Share these with a partner - how do your answers compare?

2. Light plays an important part in the poem. Jot down all the references to light, dark and the moon.

Light

Dark

Moon

### Structure - the way the poem is built

1. Look at the first line of each stanza. How do these show the focus of attention in the poem gradually changing?

.....  
.....



### The words on the page

1. Here are the words of the first stanza displayed as continuous text. Tweak some of the words to change the mood from negative to positive.

Some suggestions have been made as an example.

They have watered the street, it shines in the ~~glare~~ light of lamps, ~~cold~~ bright, white lamps, and lies like a slow-moving river, barred with silver and black. Cabs go down it, one, and then another. Between them I hear the shuffling of feet. Tramps doze on the window-ledges, night-walkers pass along the sidewalks. The city is squalid and sinister, with the silver-barred street in the midst, slow-moving, a river leading nowhere.

2. Repetition is almost always significant. How many significant words are repeated - i.e. not including words such as 'the', 'it' and so on? Highlight all the ones you can find - you may be surprised at how many there are.



3. Which of the repetitions do you think are most important?  
Choose three and explain why.

1

.....  
.....  
.....



2

.....  
.....  
.....



3

.....  
.....  
.....



## Inside the poem

1. **Imagery:** The two thematic images in the poem are 'river' and 'moon'.  
How does the poet describe the river and the moon, and what differences  
are there in the way they are described?

.....  
.....



2. **Shape:** Is there anything interesting about the shape of the poem you  
could comment on? How does the punctuation affect the way the poem is  
read?

.....  
.....



3. **The ending:** What is the effect of the last two lines?

.....  
.....



## Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. Is the poem more effective in creating a picture of the city or a portrait of the poet and her feelings?

.....  
.....



2. Explain your judgement and go on to say what your personal response to the poem is.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



## Teaching notes



### **'Frost Fair'**

Rowyda Amin

#### First encounter

---

- Students may well be baffled by this poem, especially at first reading. Hence the reminder that poems can create imaginary worlds, with which they will be familiar from books, films and television. The writer appears to be melding past and present - hot dogs and dancing bears, taxis and booths on the frozen Thames. Some things could be from past or present, others are ambiguous. What are the screaming hens on the sleigh? Girls on a carousel?
- 'You' seems to be the voice of the protagonist rather than addressed to another person, but whether it is the voice of the poet or an imagined character, we are left to wonder.
- Most students dislike uncertainty but in discussing poetry they will have to get used to it! They need to become familiar with a vocabulary which will make them feel more comfortable with expressing uncertainty.

#### Getting closer to the poem

---

- 'Alas my love, you do me wrong. / Thy girdle of gold so red. / And yet thou wouldst not love.' These phrases stand out from the rest of the poem and some may recognise them as lines from (one version of) Greensleeves. Students would not be expected to know this in an exam; if the board thought it was sufficiently significant, it would be explained in a footnote. However, students should be able to see that these lines are different and have a stab at what part they play. Notice that the first example comes immediately after the mention of ballad singers. So here the writer is again mingling an old song with a contemporary setting and mood, which adds to the mysterious quality of the poem. (Interestingly, the Greensleeves lyric reads 'And yet thou wouldst not love me'. Some students may find this intriguing if it is revealed after the activities have been completed.)
-

- The words provided to describe the mood can be added to. There is no right answer, of course, but choices require explanation which leads to discussion. A number of the terms are quite similar in meaning and teasing out differences and subtleties is useful.

## Structure - the way the poem is built

---

- There are different ways of dividing the poem, as well. The lines from Greensleeves could form the final words of each stanza. The first two stanzas then paint pictures observed by the writer but the final one becomes more personal, expressing the desires of the writer.

## The words on the page

---

- In terms of contrasts, there are many, but the interweaving of past and present, the real and the imaginary seems key. In some ways, it is all imaginary. After all, there has not been a frost fair on the Thames for more than two hundred years. This leads back to the terms used to describe the mood of the poem and then on to the choice of a significant word. Students could write their word on a post-it and these could be displayed for comparison and discussion. Anonymity is often helpful.

## Inside the poem

---

- **Imagery.** There is some interesting figurative language, which students may or may not find effective. Why, for example, are taxis 'black as death's pyjamas'? It's an arresting image but is it a good or appropriate one?
- **Sound.** There is a repetition of an 'o' sound in the first half to thirds of the poem. This adds a certain harmony to a reading but does it have any other purpose? It doesn't have to - assonance and alliteration have been used over the centuries simply for the pleasing sound.
- **The ending.** The poem ends with a seriously indented line and the final song quotation. What are we to make of the former? (It's always possible that it's a typographical error - stranger things have happened!) It certainly slows the poem down with a jolt, ready for the final, rather blunt 'And yet thou wouldst not love'. Is she merely using a line from Greensleeves as a nice finishing touch or does it have deeper significance? If the 'you' is the writer, is this recognition of an inability or unwillingness to love? Again, the reader can ponder and wonder but not know for sure.

## Thoughts, response, conclusion

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- Again, students' responses could be written on separate pieces of paper and then circulated anonymously to start discussion. It's a poem full of vivid images, intriguing and yet, like a dream, impossible to pin down.
-



## 'Frost Fair'

Rowyda Amin

Slideshow faces flicker from the station.  
You're following the mood to London Bridge  
where taxis cruise black as death's pyjamas.  
The Thames you find is glacier silk, shantied  
with booths and carousels. Five screaming hens  
speed by in a white horse sleigh. Ballad singers  
busk their vagrant lines. *Alas my love, you do me wrong.*  
Crowds scoff hotdogs and candyfloss,  
cheer as Punch batters Judy with the baby.  
Hog roasts spit fat on the ice, children watching  
with faces pink and hot. *Thy girdle of gold so red.*  
Falling snow feathers the whipped bear moonwalking in chains.  
It looks at you with marshmallow eyes  
and you want to take its arms and zip over the ice,  
feel fur on your cheeks, skating against the wind to the estuary  
where the ice breaks apart, but you smile, hands in pockets,  
and turn to the skittles and acrobats,  
sugared crepes and hot wine.  
*And yet thou wouldst not love.*

**Glossary:** *Frost Fairs* - these were held on the River Thames in London in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century when the winters were so cold that the river froze over.

1. What's going on? What are your first impressions of the scene described? Remember that poems, like stories can include every kind of imagined experience from fantasy to science fiction.



- 

- 

Present	Either	Past
Hot dogs	Punch and Judy	The frozen river

2. There are three short sentences in italics which do not seem to fit with the rest of the poem. Why - apart from the italics - do they seem different?

.....

.....

.....

.....



3. Which one word would you use to describe the poem's mood? Why?



.....

.....



### Structure - the way the poem is built

1. If the poem were to be divided into three stanzas, where would you make the divisions?

Draw arrows where you would make the divisions. Next to them write a brief explanation of why you've made the division there.

## The words on the page

1. Look at the instances of 'you'. Where are they concentrated? How does this make this part of the poem stand out from the rest?
2. Find contrasts in the poem, for example 'hot and cold', 'slow and fast', 'past and present'.

Contrast	Examples
Hot and cold	

3. Which five words strike you as the most important or unusual?

1	3	5
2	4	

4. Pick one of them and explain why you chose it:

.....  
.....



## Inside the poem

1. **Imagery.** Select two examples where the poet has used figurative language and explain why it is effective - or not.

.....  
.....





2. **Sound.** One vowel sound is more prevalent than others, especially in the first half of the poem. What effect does this have on your reading, if any?

.....  
.....



3. **The ending.** What do you make of the ending? Does it affect how you understand the rest of the poem?

.....  
.....



### Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. Has your view of the poem changed since you first read it? Write a few lines about your first reaction to the poem and how you view it now. This is your personal response but still needs to be based on the words on the page.

.....  
.....  
.....



'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am' by Amy Lowell and 'Frost Fair' by Rowyda Amin  
Comparison resource

'Frost Fair' and 'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am': Compare the poets' feelings about being in the city. Add your thoughts/notes underneath the heading prompts.

'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am'

They have watered the street,  
It shines in the glare of lamps,  
Cold, white lamps,  
And lies  
Like a slow-moving river,  
Barred with silver and black.  
Cabs go down it,  
One,  
And then another,  
Between them I hear the shuffling of feet.  
Tramps doze on the window-ledges,  
Night-walkers pass along the sidewalks.  
The city is squalid and sinister,  
With the silver-barred street in the midst,  
Slow-moving,  
A river leading nowhere.

Opposite my window,  
The moon cuts,  
Clear and round,  
Through the plum-coloured night.  
She cannot light the city;  
It is too bright.  
It has white lamps,  
And glitters coldly.

I stand in the window and watch the moon.  
She is thin and lustreless,  
But I love her.  
I know the moon,  
And this is an alien city.

Amy Lowell

'Frost Fair'

Slideshow faces flicker from the station.  
You're following the mood to London Bridge  
where taxis cruise black as death's pyjamas.  
The Thames you find is glacier silk, shantied  
with booths and carousels. Five screaming hens  
speed by in a white horse sleigh. Ballad singers  
busk their vagrant lines. *Alas my love, you do me wrong.*  
Crowds scoff hotdogs and candyfloss,  
cheer as Punch batters Judy with the baby.  
Hog roasts spit fat on the ice, children watching  
with faces pink and hot. *Thy girdle of gold so red.*  
Falling snow feathers the whipped bear moonwalking in chains.  
It looks at you with marshmallow eyes  
and you want to take its arms and zip over the ice,  
feel fur on your cheeks, skating against the wind to the estuary  
where the ice breaks apart, but you smile, hands in pockets,  
and turn to the skittles and acrobats,  
sugared crepes and hot wine.  
*And yet thou wouldst not love.*

Rowyda Amin

'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am' by Amy Lowell and 'Frost Fair' by Rowyda Amin  
Comparison resource

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monochrome/colour		cold/warm	
listlessness/energy		negative/positive	
one sense/many senses	one feeling/range of feelings		isolated/engaged

---

'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am' by Amy Lowell and 'Frost Fair' by Rowyda Amin

## Comparison resource

**'Frost Fair' and 'London Thoroughfare 2 a.m.': Compare the poets' feelings about being in the city.**

Use the words and phrases from the word bank to fill in the cells under appropriate headings. Some may fit under more than one heading.

Monochrome / colour		Cold / warm		listlessness / energy	
Negative / positive		One sense / many senses		Isolation / company	
alien city	skating against the wind	shuffling	too bright	children watching	
black as death's pyjamas	you smile	shuffling of feet	tramps doze	falling snow feathers	
cannot light	glitters coldly	skittles and acrobats	white horse sleigh	marshmallow eyes	
clear and round	leading nowhere	silver and black	crepes and hot wine	zip over the ice	
cold white lamps	pink and hot	singers busk	you do me wrong	feel fur	
girdle of gold so red	plum-coloured night	slow-moving	crowds	thou wouldst not love	
glacier silk	scoff hotdogs	squalid and sinister	cheer		
glare of lamps	screaming hens speed by	thin and lustreless	spit fat		

**AQA exam style question****Section C: Unseen poetry**Answer **both** questions in this section**A London Thoroughfare. 2 am**

How they strut about, people in love,  
how tall they grow, pleased with themselves,  
their hair, glossy, their skin shining.  
They don't remember who they have been.

- 5** How filmic they are just for this time.  
How important they've become - secret, above  
the order of things, the dreary mundane.  
Every church bell ringing, a fresh sign.

- How dull the lot that are not in love.  
**10** Their clothes shabby, their skin lustreless;  
how clueless they are, hair a mess; how they trudge  
up and down streets in the rain,

- remembering one kiss in a dark alley,  
a touch in a changing-room, if lucky, a lovely wait  
**15** for the phone to ring, maybe, baby.  
The past with its rush of velvet, its secret hush  
already miles away, dimming now, in the late day.

*Amy Lowell*

1. In 'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am, how does the poet present the speaker's reaction to being in London?

**[24 marks]**

**Frost Fair**

Slideshow faces flicker from the station.

You're following the mood to London Bridge  
where taxis cruise black as death's pyjamas.

The Thames you find is glacier silk, shantied

5 with booths and carousels. Five screaming hens  
speed by in a white horse sleigh. Ballad singers  
busk their vagrant lines. *Alas my love, you do me wrong.*

Crowds scoff hotdogs and candyfloss,

cheer as Punch batters Judy with the baby.

10 Hog roasts spit fat on the ice, children watching  
with faces pink and hot. *Thy girdle of gold so red.*

Falling snow feathers the whipped bear moonwalking in chains.

It looks at you with marshmallow eyes

and you want to take its arms and zip over the ice,

15 feel fur on your cheeks, skating against the wind to the estuary  
where the ice breaks apart, but you smile, hands in pockets,  
and turn to the skittles and acrobats,

sugared crepes and hot wine.

*And yet thou wouldst not love.*

*Rowyda Amin*

2. In both 'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am' and 'Frost Fair' the speakers describe feelings about being in a city. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

[8 marks]



## **'Long Life'**

**Elaine Feinstein**  
(b. 1930)

Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.

It is a fortune beyond any deserving  
to be still here, with no more than everyday worries,  
placidly arranging lines of poetry.

I consider a stick of cinnamon  
bound in raffia, finches  
in the grass, and a stubby bush  
which this year mothered a lemon.

These days I speak less of death  
than the mysteries of survival. I am  
no longer lonely, not yet frail, and  
after surgery, recognise each breath

as a miracle. My generation may not be  
nimble but, forgive us,  
we'd like to hold on, stubbornly  
content - even while ageing.

---

Use the annotations as a starting point for your response to the poem.  
Add your own points and a personal conclusion.

Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.

A wide view, gradually focusing down. Short, sharp observations. Nouns - no fussy adjectives.

It is a fortune beyond any deserving  
to be still here, with no more than everyday worries,  
placidly arranging lines of poetry.

A simple statement of feeling.

A definite verse form with simple rhyme scheme: ABCA

I consider a stick of cinnamon  
bound in raffia, finches  
in the grass, and a stubby bush  
which this year mothered a lemon.

Everyday objects - at least to her. Focusing on things closer.

'mothering' - more interesting than 'produced'

These days I speak less of death  
than the mysteries of survival. I am  
no longer lonely, not yet frail, and  
after surgery, recognise each breath

A return to feelings, simply expressed.

Language - calm, reflective - NB highlights

as a miracle. My generation may not be  
nimble but, forgive us,  
we'd like to hold on, stubbornly  
content - even while ageing.

Moving to a more general statement. Addressing us all.

Rhymes ABAA(?) ageing is a near rhyme.





**'Fish oil, exercise and  
no wild parties'**  
Beatrice Garland

My lifelong friend, dear heart,  
these days you're losing the plot:

you're a fish in a bucket,  
open-mouthed, flopping about

in a panic, bereft of your sheen,  
all confidence gone.

Examined in action  
on a black and white screen,

every movement recorded,  
you're haplessly tethered,

chaotically jumping, locked  
into a pulse of your own. Tracked

by the inks on that turning drum  
we see what will come

if that spidery record persists  
Slow down then, no coffee, resist

the enticement of alcohol,  
not even a thimbleful

and I will net you, my flailing fish,  
land you without a splash

into calm waters, weaving  
upstream, steady and breathing.

Till the hook's savage grab  
lands us both on a slab.

Use the annotations as a starting point for your response to the poem.  
Add your own points and a personal conclusion.

**Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties**

Beatrice Garland

My lifelong friend, dear heart,  
these days you're losing the plot: —

you're a fish in a bucket, fl  
open-mouthed, flopping about  
real or metaphorical?  
in a panic, bereft of your sheen,  
all confidence gone.

Examined in action  
on a black and white screen,

every movement recorded,  
you're haplessly tethered,

chaotically jumping, locked  
into a pulse of your own. Tracked

by the inks on that turning drum  
we see what will come

if that spidery record persists.  
Slow down then, no coffee, resist

the enticement of alcohol,  
not even a thimbleful

and I will net you, my flailing fish,  
land you without a splash

into calm waters, weaving  
upstream, steady and breathing.

Till the hook's savage grab  
lands us both on a slab.

advice for healthy life

colloquial

strong image

Medical scan?

and 1/2 rhymes

rhymes but no particular pattern

why tethered/jumping?

? some kind of medical recorder/monitor?

return to colloq. language

fish image developed

unusual image of looking after someone

like salmon

calmer waters, calmer rhythm

short sharp ending.

Mixture of serious + comic.

fish on a slab. Slab in a mortuary.

Starts almost comically but becomes serious

Unseen.

Heart attack?  
"dear heart"

attached to life-support?  
drips?

**'Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties'**

My lifelong friend, dear heart,  
these days you're losing the plot:

you're a fish in a bucket,  
open-mouthed, flopping about

in a panic, bereft of your sheen,  
all confidence gone.

Examined in action  
on a black and white screen,

every movement recorded,  
you're haplessly tethered,

chaotically jumping, locked  
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and I will net you, my flailing fish,  
land you without a splash

into calm waters, weaving  
upstream, steady and breathing.

Till the hook's savage grab  
lands us both on a slab.

*by Beatrice Garland*

**'Long Life'**

Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.

It is a fortune beyond any deserving  
to be still here, with no more than everyday  
worries,  
placidly arranging lines of poetry.

I consider a stick of cinnamon  
bound in raffia, finches  
in the grass, and a stubby bush  
which this year mothered a lemon.

These days I speak less of death  
than the mysteries of survival. I am  
no longer lonely, not yet frail, and  
after surgery, recognise each breath

as a miracle. My generation may not be  
nimble but, forgive us,  
we'd like to hold on, stubbornly  
content - even while ageing

*by Elaine Feinstein*

**Question: 'Compare the way the two poets tackle the issue of illness and death.'**

Think about the exam question's use of 'the way'. This can be taken to mean both the techniques the poets use and their attitudes. Make sure you cover both aspects and, if possible, link them together.

**Other points to consider:**

Who is the writer addressing? What difference does it make?

What is their tone? How can you tell? What effect do they want to have on their audience?

Explore the similarities and differences in use of verses, rhyme and rhythm. How do these affect the reader or listener?

Look at the nouns and verbs in each poem - how does the choice of specific words make a difference to the effect of the poems?

Overall, what impact does each poem have on you?

## AQA exam style question

### Section C: Unseen poetry

Answer **both** questions in this section

#### Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties

My lifelong friend, dear heart,  
these days you're losing the plot:  
you're a fish in a bucket,  
open-mouthed, flopping about  
5 in a panic, bereft of your sheen,  
all confidence gone.  
Examined in action  
on a black and white screen,  
every movement recorded,  
10 you're haplessly tethered,  
chaotically jumping, locked  
into a pulse of your own. Tracked  
by the inks on that turning drum  
we see what will come  
15 if that spidery record persists  
Slow down then, no coffee, resist  
the enticement of alcohol,  
not even a thimbleful  
and I will net you, my flailing fish,  
20 land you without a splash  
into calm waters, weaving  
upstream, steady and breathing.  
Till the hook's savage grab  
lands us both on a slab.

*Beatrice Garland*

1. In 'Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about getting old?

[24 marks]

**Long Life**

Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.

It is a fortune beyond any deserving  
to be still here, with no more than everyday worries,  
placidly arranging lines of poetry.

5 I consider a stick of cinnamon  
bound in raffia, finches  
in the grass, and a stubby bush  
which this year mothered a lemon.

These days I speak less of death  
10 than the mysteries of survival. I am  
no longer lonely, not yet frail, and  
after surgery, recognise each breath

as a miracle. My generation may not be  
nimble but, forgive us,  
15 we'd like to hold on, stubbornly  
content - even while ageing.

*Elaine Feinstein*

2. In both 'Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties' and 'Long Life' the speakers describe their feelings about illness and death. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

**[8 marks]**

---

**AQA**

**Section C: Unseen poetry**

Answer **both** questions in this section

Answer both questions in this section.

**An Aviary of Small Birds**

My love is an aviary  
of small birds  
and I must learn  
to leave the door ajar...

- 5** Are you the sparrow  
who landed when I sat  
at a slate table  
sowing lettuces?

- 10** Webbs Wonder, Lollo  
Rosso, English Cos...  
Swift and deft  
you flit and peck peck

- 15** quick as the light that  
constitutes your spirit.  
Yes, you were briefer  
than Neruda's octobrine.

- 20** So much rain that night.  
Our room is an ocean  
where swallows dive.  
The bubble bursts

too soon, too late, too long:  
all sorts of microscopia  
swim upstream, float in  
on summer's storm.

- 25** The tenor of your heart  
is true as a tuning fork struck  
—and high! My love  
is the bird who flies free.

Karen McCarthy Woolf

1. In 'An Aviary of Small Birds', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about her child?

[24 marks]

**Mother o'Mine**

If I were hanged on the highest hill,  
*Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*  
I know whose love would follow me still,  
*Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*

5 If I were drowned in the deepest sea,  
*Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*  
I know whose tears would come down to me,  
*Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*

10 If I were damned of body and soul,  
I know whose prayers would make me whole,  
*Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*

Rudyard Kipling

2. In both 'An Aviary of Small Birds' and 'Mother o'Mine' the speakers describe feelings about a loved one. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?
-