

OK, so you have 15/20 minutes to get this right!

- When tackling the unseen poem, first look at the title, layout (shape) and see if it falls into any category (sonnet etc).
- Read the poem twice asking yourself "what is the main central point being made by the poet?"
- Ask yourself "what is the dominant mood in the poem, does it change and why?"
- Look for strong images created by the poem. What techniques are used?
- What is the rhythm like? Look for run on lines etc.
- Do you like the poem, why?

Unseen Poetry

Before anything else, read the poem two or three times. Then try to grasp its meaning - what is the theme, what is the tone, what is the poet trying to say here? By studying the structure and language of the poem, you will gain an insight into the poem's meaning. The more times you read the poem, the more you will understand the meaning of the poem.

Having said that, contemporary poetry is sometimes difficult to interpret. It can often have several meanings, or its meaning can be unequivocal. Sometimes, the poet doesn't want it to have any particular meaning, preferring instead the reader takes his/her own interpretation. You are advised to be as open and non-judgemental as possible when answering the unseen poetry question.

The poet communicates thoughts, emotions and ideas to the reader through a particular choice of words and structure. The objective of the poem can differ. Sometimes the poem might challenge readers' perceptions of how they view things, and help them see things in a different light. For some people, poetry is highly personal, and they engage with poems on a subjective level. In this way, you can learn a lot about life and understanding life through poetry.

To help you gain a deeper understanding of what the meaning or content of a poem, try examining the following:

Ideas

- State what you believe to be the main idea or ideas of the poem, approaching it stanza by stanza.
- Note the key words or phrases repeated throughout the poem.
- Think about why the stanzas/lines are structured in a particular way.
- Explore the relationships throughout the poem.
- See if there are any recurring themes in the poem, and elicit what the poet is trying to say by writing about these.

Persona

- Who is the speaker in the poem? Is it the poet, or is it the poet taking on another voice?
- Who is the poet speaking to? Is it him/herself, is it a particular person, or is it the reader?
- What can we tell about the poet from studying the poem.

Language

When studying the language of a poem, there are certain elements to look out for:

Tone: What is the poem's tone (sad, happy, reflective, morose, philosophical, etc.)

Rhythm: Is there a musical quality to the poem, does it rhyme, does it follow a particular rhythm or

is the rhythm fragmented?

Techniques: Does the poet use writing techniques to enhance the language, e.g., alliteration (the repetition of consonants) and assonance (the repetition of vowels).

Imagery: What imagery does the poem use and how does it shape your meaning of the poem.

Symbolism: Does the poet use symbolism to illustrate his/her views and is it effective.

Words: These are the essence of a poem, and it is important you're aware of key words and expressions and how they form your understanding and appreciation of the poem.

Grammar and punctuation: Poets differ in how they express themselves. Sometimes words are not enough in themselves and poets might use unorthodox grammar or different punctuation to get their points across. Be aware of this.

Sound: Read the poem a couple of times over, listening to the sounds. Depending on the sound, a poem can be sensual, or sad, or maybe angry, or happy. See what emotions the poem has on you through listening to it.