

Answering an Unseen Poetry Question

What do I do?

1. Read the question
2. Read the poem, checking the glossary for any words you are unsure of
3. Read the question again, highlighting any keywords.
4. Read the poem again, annotating any techniques and their effects
5. Plan your answer by mind mapping your ideas.
6. Write your answer
7. Check your answer

Useful Words and Phrases

- Here, the poet suggests...
- This conveys...
- This connotes...
- This word has connotations of...
- The use of... emphasises the idea that....
- The poet is implying that...
- From this we can infer that...

Structure and Form

- What does the poem look like on the page?
- Is it regular? Irregular? Are there any surprises?
- What do you notice about the length of the lines?
- Are there any sudden changes like a short line to add emphasis or draw attention to an idea?
- Does the poet use enjambment? If the lines flow into each other in this way is there a reason for it such as a distant memory or stream of consciousness?
- Are there stanzas?
- Have they been divided in a certain way deliberately to fit in with the ideas of the poem or to show a change in subject or mood?
- Is it one long stanza? Why has this been done deliberately?
- Is it a sonnet? (14 line poem traditionally used when writing love poems)
- Does the form reflect the meaning in any way?

Mood – Tone and Atmosphere

- Think about the mood of the poem.
- It could be one of these:
- Happy, joyful, enthusiastic, ominous, reflective, sad, quiet, angry, passionate, moralistic, warning, chatty, mysterious, excited, nostalgic, humorous, tense, bitter, sombre, ironic, playful, sarcastic, melancholy.
- How can you tell? Which words and phrases convey the mood?
- Maybe the use of rhythm/lack of rhythm adds to the mood?
- Is it personal or more objective? (1st or 3rd person)
- Does the mood and tone relay something about the writer's attitude toward the subject of the poem?
- What feeling are you left with at the end of the poem?

Imagery

- Pick out any unusual or interesting words, images or phrases.
- Think about the associations of the words used.
- Do any words surprise you?
- Do any have a strong impact?
- Do any make you feel certain emotions?
- How is figurative language used to create vivid impressions?
- Similes
- Metaphors
- Personification
- Appeals to the senses.
- Are contrasting words/ideas used?
- Don't forget you must comment on the effect rather than just identifying techniques.

Language

- Identify any words or phrases that stand out and describe why they stand out for you, are they unusual, shocking, striking, vivid or unexpected? Explain why.
- Verb choices are interesting too look at.
- Is the language complex or simple and why might this be?
- Is the language formal or informal? Colloquial? Why might this be?
- Do the lines run quickly or are they slow and steady? Do they speed up in places or slow down? Again, think about why the poet might have done this.
- Does the poet use alliteration/assonance or onomatopoeia for effect?
- Are words, phrases or ideas repeated to emphasise certain points?