

Looking at Learners' Responses

Read the two poems, *A Gull* by Edwin Morgan and *Considering the Snail* by Thom Gunn. In both of these poems the poets write about the effect animals have on people.

A Gull

A seagull stood on my window ledge today,
said nothing, but had a good look inside.
That was a cold inspection I can tell you!
North, winds, icebergs, flash of salt
crashed through the glass without a sound.
He shifted from leg to leg, swivelled his head.
There was not a fish in the house – only me.
Did he smell my flesh, that white one? Did he think
I would soon open the window and scatter bread?
Calculation in those eyes is quick.
'I tell you, my chick, there is food everywhere.'
He eyed my furniture, my plants, an apple.
Perhaps he was a mutation, a supergull.
Perhaps he was, instead, a visitation
which only used that tight firm forward body
to bring the waste and dread of open waters,
foundered voyages, matchless predators,
into a dry room. I knew nothing.
I moved; I moved an arm. When the thing saw
the shadow of that, it suddenly flapped,
scattered claws along the sill, and was off,
silent still. Who would be next for those eyes,
I wondered, and were they ready, and in order?

Edwin Morgan

Considering the Snail

The snail pushes through a green
night, for the grass is heavy
with water and meets over
the bright path he makes, where rain
has darkened the earth's dark. He
moves in a wood of desire,
pale antlers barely stirring
as he hunts. I cannot tell
what power is at work, drenched there
with purpose, knowing nothing.
What is a snail's fury? All
I think is that if later
I parted the blades above
the tunnel and saw the thin
trail of broken white across
litter, I would never have
imagined the slow passion
to that deliberate progress.

Thomas Gunn

Below are excerpts of learner responses to this question. In each case, cut out the examiner's comments then have learners place the comments in the correct boxes – one highlighting something positive about the answer and one providing a comment on how the answer could be improved.

(a) Write about the poem **A Gull** by *Edwin Morgan*, and its effect on you. [15]

Excerpt 1

I think that the poet wants the reader to think of the seagull as a very powerful, commanding creature that can intimidate as shown through 'who would be next for these eyes'. This suggests that the eyes are enchanting and could send a chill down anyone's spine.

Excerpt 2

I enjoyed this poem because it uses very good vocabulary to paint a vivid image of the seagull's power and stature. Also, it teaches me to appreciate the common and little things in life.

Excerpt 3

The structure of the poem also leads the reader to think that Morgan is afraid. Throughout the poem, a mixture of simple and complex sentences are used.

Excerpt 4

Throughout the poem, the reader gets the feeling of judgement from this seagull as if it was assessing them. In the third line Morgan described it as a 'cold inspection' which suggests that the seagull is there to judge him.

Answers for A Gull



Excerpt 1

- This is valid comment with a supporting piece of evidence.
- Needs to choose vocabulary.

Excerpt 2

- A valid personal response.
- Evidence required.

Excerpt 3

- Some awareness of the subject terminology and how a sense of fear is shown.
- It's too general – needs to develop by being more specific and not spot techniques.

Excerpt 4

- Sound points are made and valid details used to support these points.
- There are some unnecessary words and sentences and this could be condensed without losing marks.

b) Now compare Considering the **Snail** by *Thom Gunn* and **A Gull** by *Edwin Morgan*. [25]

Cut out these extracts and put them in order from highest mark to the lowest. Choose the correct examiner comment for each extract.

Extract 1

Both of the poems are very similar because, firstly, they're poems about nature. Both use vivid descriptions of the animal within each poem to show the true beauty of nature. Also, both of the poems explore the idea of appreciating beauty and admiring the little things. This is done through the close detail of the animal's traits and characteristic down to the minute detail. This helps us appreciate nature even more because it shows things for us to go out and do-appreciate the little, common things as if they are rare and astonishing. Both of the poems 'A Gull' and 'Considering the Snail' have a seagull and a snail as the main focal point respectively. Considering these are relatively 'normal' animals that can often be seen, they both do draw in the reader and help them admire the animal's beauty and power. Both of the poems talk about the stories that the animals may have experienced and can be seen within the animals characteristics. However, the poems do have slightly different structures and 'A Gull's' structure is made more apparent. For example 'A Gull' shows the confused nature of the speaker of the seagull before they think about it and then what the future holds for it. However, 'Considering the Snail' has a much more discreet structure, this means it is a lot more freeflowing and is constantly changing. I enjoyed both of the poems because they both used vivid descriptions to describe the respective animals and I could really picture the animal's stature and power and what they've both experienced. Also, both make me appreciate the little things in life and help me admire the beauty that surrounds me.

Choose the correct comment:

- Discusses and makes thoughtful comment on language and the meaning and effect. Comparison sustained.
- Comparison is valid and there is some relevant but quite general discussion. This would benefit from quotations and detailed language focus.
- While there are a few good points in this excerpt, they are undeveloped. This starts to spot techniques without any supporting details or comments on effects.

Extract 2

The two poems, at first look, contrast each other quite a lot. Morgan describes the actions of a strong and powerful first animal whereas Gunn describes a much slower and smaller animal. There is also a contrast between the two found in the title. 'A Gull' is a short and direct choice of words whereas 'Considering the Snail' is more understanding and deeper almost. However, both poets suggest how these animals are much more knowing about the world than us. In 'A Gull' it states 'I know nothing' and in 'Considering the Snail' it says 'I cannot tell what power is at work'. These lines in both these poems give the impression that the animal knows something more than the speaker does, and that they are almost oblivious to the world compared to the animal.

Both the poems also suggest that the animal is quite noble and strong, despite the obvious difference between a gull and a snail. 'A Gull' shows that the seagull has come from the cold outside and 'dread of open water' and 'Considering a Snail' describes its journey through 'a green night' which 'implies that both animals survive and live in a very challenging world yet are still alive and surviving and content.

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Extract 3

One poem is about a snail and the other about a bird. The poems contrast the poets reactions to the animals. One is scared of the seagull and one is interested even though it's a snail. Also, the titles of the poems are contrasts. "A Gull" is straight-forward and blunt "Considering the Snail" is more thoughtful and philosophical. In terms of similarities both animals have more to them than you may think and are quite powerful in their own ways. Similes and metaphors are used in both and one has a complete stanza and the other is split into several stanzas. I prefer 'The Gull' as a snail is boring.

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Answers to 'Considering the Snail'

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