

Poetry

- General -

1. Poems have deliberately been presented without background images etc. so that the focus is concentrated on the words in the poem.
2. In most cases it will be helpful if learners have a printed copy of the full poem being studied in front of them. However, some activities involve deleted words, so this needs to be checked in advance.
3. Teachers are advised to select the activities that match the approach they want to use and the needs of the learners rather than (necessarily) working through activities A, B, C...
4. The suggested approach in many cases is for the teacher to indicate the question at the top of the screen and invite answers from the whole class. The prompts on the right of the screen can then be used to help the discussion move forward/ probe answers more deeply.
5. The glossaries are not intended to be used before learners have had the chance to use contextual clues and prior knowledge to investigate meanings for themselves.
6. Where there are references to pronouns, verbs etc., this has nothing to do with naming the parts; the approaches suggested here should contribute to learners being able to explore poems thoughtfully and comment on choice of language precisely.
7. Biographical information has been kept to the minimum as it is not part of the assessment and can lead to irrelevance in answers. It has been provided where it contributes to an understanding of the specific poem.
8. The approaches suggested here are by no means definitive. An equally valid approach would be to hand out a copy of a particular poem and ask learners to comment on what they understand and raise questions on areas they would like to explore further. Teachers may well have tried and tested approaches to poems which are very effective and should not be dropped from the repertoire.
9. **If answers in controlled assessment are very similar and derivative (carbon copies of notes etc.), the higher grades cannot be achieved. Learners should be regularly reminded that the best answers involve a personal response and the tolerance and exploration of ambiguity. Learners can be reminded that poems are not scientific documents with one definitive meaning.**
10. The guidance here on comparison is clearly limited as no two poems are explicitly compared. 50% of the marks are therefore available for a more personal approach than may be the case after joint class study of individual poems. However, learners should be encouraged to develop their individual angles, backed up with textual detail, in all aspects of their work.

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Comparing poems

What interesting similarities and differences can the students identify in the poems they are studying?

Giving the students one poem, discuss and decide with them which other poem they are studying would provide the most illuminating parallel overall, in terms of the following approaches:

- choice of title
- the 'main theme' if clear - relationship, growing up, love, nature, war etc.
- choice of voice/point of view
- choice of approach/treatment
- presentation of character(s)
- choice of setting
- creation of mood and atmosphere
- structure and organisation
- choice of imagery
- style and its effect
- overall impact.

Different elements on the list above will be appropriate for different pairings of poems, and it would be far too much to cover all of the items in the list. Look for three promising areas to compare in the first instance, and go on to cover one or two of the others if you have time and the comparison is an interesting one. It is far better to explore a few promising areas in detail than to make a series of surface comparisons.

In some ways it is easier to write a comparison than to write about just one poem. A finished poem may seem inevitable - what other way could it possibly have been written? However, if you compare it with another poem, the choices of the poet become more obvious. For example, one poem has the title 'A Peasant' and the other poem has the title 'The Master'. You note the difference in this example, and then you can go on to explore what different attitudes and approaches the two titles imply - why each poet has made this particular choice.

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Table of useful connectives

Add your own examples when you find ones that are helpful. Many of the connectives shown with a capital letter can also be used, with care, in the middle of a sentence as an alternative to using them at the beginning.

Suggesting similarities				
Similarly...	In the same way...	This links with...	Equally,also...
...as well.				
Suggesting contrasts				
...whereas...	In contrast...	...while...	On the other hand...	(use negative)
However,	Yet...			
Making qualifications				
Nevertheless...	In spite of that...	However,...		
Summing up				
Overall...	Summing up...	In the main...	On the whole...	In conclusion...

Varying sentence structure when comparing poems

If students always start sentences with the subject of the comparison (The theme is, The structure is...) this becomes repetitive and boring to read (and write!). Sometimes start this way, but here are some other suggestions for starting sentences. You can start with:

- the name of one poem
- the name of one poet
- a connective such as Whereas..., However..., Similarly..., In terms of...
- a quotation from one poem
- a word class: The choice of verbs in...
- By..., for example By using..., By choosing..., By selecting..., By tackling...

Poetry is often exploring themes and ideas that are difficult to express in words. To reflect this complexity it is often worth using verbs such as *hint*, *suggest*, *indicate*, *imply* rather than always using more decisive verbs such as *show*, *demonstrate*, *reveal*. Build up a word bank of verbs etc. which will be useful in exploring your personal response to poems.

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General advice on reading and responding to poems

- Do not necessarily expect to understand every word. You can concentrate on the parts/aspects that make the most sense to you.
- Read the poem aloud in your head. Only stop at full stops, even if this means reading through the end of the line or even the end of a stanza. You can have a shorter mental pause at commas.
- It may even be worth highlighting the full stops in some way, which helps to give an idea of the structure of the poem.
- If there are people involved in the poem, work out who they are and the relationship between them, as far as you can tell.
- Pronouns sometimes play an important part in understanding a poem. It may help to highlight and identify who is being referred to: I, you, we etc.
- Powerful verbs often indicate the strongest thoughts and feelings in a poem. See if you can identify any particularly effective choices of verbs in the poem.
- Many poems develop from beginning to end, or involve some sort of tension or conflict. It is usually very illuminating to explore any such development or tension or conflict as it will be at the heart of the poem's central meaning.
- You may feel at some stages that you are undermining your enjoyment of the poem by analysing too much. However, the process of understanding how the poet has crafted the poem may in the end enhance your enjoyment. You can then come back to the poem at a later stage and feel the benefit of your earlier 'deconstruction' work.