

Answers

Unseen Poetry

Answers to the AQA exam-style questions are indicative only and highlight the key things that should be included in your response. You may cover other points. It's how your answer is written and how it fits with the mark scheme that will determine the quality of your answer.

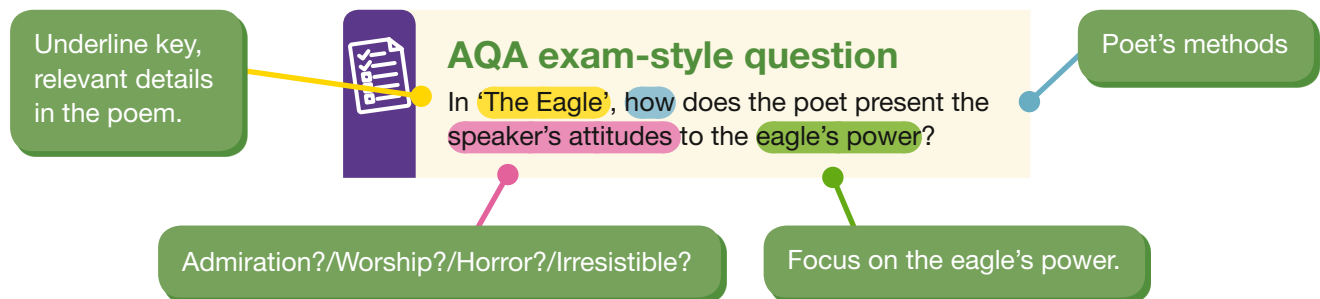
AQA Unseen poetry – the basics

p.10–23

p.12 Do it!



For example:



p.12 Do it!



For example:

<p>The Eagle</p> <p>Alfred Lord Tennyson</p> <p>He clasps the crag with crooked hands;</p> <p>Close to the sun in lonely lands, Ringed with the azure world, he stands.</p> <p>The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls; He watches from his mountain walls, And like a thunderbolt he falls.</p>	<p>The iambic rhythm (dee, dum) suggests a threatening drum or heartbeat – an irresistible threat.</p> <p>The sun is the most powerful force. 'Close' suggests that the eagle is the next most powerful.</p> <p>'watches' suggests the eagle is all-seeing – nothing can escape his gaze.</p>
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p.21 Do it!



For example:

Underline key, relevant details in the poem.

And/or – different attitudes but both react strongly/impact on the speakers.



AQA exam-style question

In both 'The Eagle' and 'Bat', the speakers describe their attitudes towards nature. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present these attitudes?

Eagle/bat – both animals; sun also nature.

Poets' methods – form v different, almost opposite.

Focus: poets' attitudes towards nature.

p.23 Stretch it!



Here is one opening with a clear, conceptual point of view:

At first the two poems seem to have completely different attitudes to nature. The speaker of 'The Eagle' worships the eagle, while the speaker in 'Bat' rejects bats. However, both speakers have strong emotional reactions to nature – reactions that seem irrational.

p.23 REVIEW IT!



- 1 35 minutes
- 2 15 minutes
- 3 Question 1 up to eight minutes; question 2 up to five minutes
- 4 It makes sure that you fully understand the question and that you have read it thoroughly.
- 5 Don't worry. Others won't understand fully either. Explore and appreciate aspects of the poem. Get the 'gist' of the poem.
- 6 Question prompts can provide a flexible framework that stop you going blank.
- 7 Comparing the poets' methods.
- 8 For example:
In 'The Deserted House', how does the poet present the speaker's attitudes to the importance of a home?
- 9 For example:
In both 'The Deserted House' and 'Living Space', the speakers describe their feelings about homes. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?
- 10 Don't forget to look back over the advice on page 17.

UNSEEN POETRY – COMPARING POEM PAIRS SECTION

p.24-57

Pair 1: poem 1: Digging, Edward Thomas

p.25–28

p.28 Do it!



What is in your plan will depend on the ideas you have. However, your plan should help you focus on both the *speaker's attitudes* to the smells of Autumn and the *methods* the poet uses. Your plan could include the following:

What		How	When
Introduction		Tone of wonder, curiosity and delight. Could this be linked to happiness?	10.33
Stanza 1	– Thinking only through the rich scents of autumn – Use of the senses – Willing to surrender the happiness that comes from physical work and simple pleasures of the smells of autumn	Contrasts (e.g. 'scents of dead leaves' – a mix of positive and negative impressions?)	10.35
Stanza 2		Clear statements made through use of short lines (as though stating as a fact, decisive tone)	10.43
Stanza 3		Sibilance (linked to smoke and smells) Explore implications of final line – everything will end	10.51
Final comment			10.58

p.28 Do it!



Response framework point 4 is used: 'What do I notice about the poem's tone or mood?'

p.28 Stretch it!



For example:

In 'Digging', Edward Thomas presents the speaker's attitudes to the smells of autumn as one of contentment and pleasure. The speaker is going to focus on thinking 'Only with scents'. This attitude suits the simplicity of the physical act of digging and the speaker's wonder and immersion in the sensual 'Odours that rise'.



p.28 AQA exam-style question

In 'Digging', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about nature?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- nature gives him the simplicity of being able to focus and think about only one thing at a time.
- nature provides him with a world of sensuous experiences: the scents of 'dead leaves'; the 'flowing' smoke; the smell and feel of 'the dark earth'; use of contrasts: 'dead...waste' that turns to sweetness.
- explore the final line and its thought that everything will change – in this case bringing winter; however, nature teaches us that spring and rebirth will follow any hard and 'winter' times.

Pair 1: poem 2: Colour Blind, Lemn Sissay

p.29–31

p.31 Do it!



Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- ‘Colour Blind’ uses a direct and clear statement to start each stanza to question a person’s use of the sense of sight, almost like an interrogation; this use of a clear and direct statement is also used in ‘Digging’: ‘Today I think’; however, the tone is not accusing, unlike ‘Colour Blind’, instead making a decision about using the sense of smell to think – there is a tone and sense of pleasure from this decision.
- ‘Colour Blind’ uses a violent and shocking image suggesting the sight and the power of the colour red dramatically; this is especially shocking as it is linked to a ‘child’, normally associated with protection and comfort: in ‘Digging’, the ‘The dead, the waste, the dangerous’ is turned to ‘sweetness’ – these negatives become positive, a further difference from ‘Colour Blind’.
- The power of the senses is seen negatively in the title of ‘Colour Blind’; if you are colour blind, you are unable to see certain colours. The last line of the poem suggests the poet is referring to skin colour; this suggests an angry tone signalling its political message. The tone of ‘Digging’ is celebratory and joyous, celebrating the power of the senses to bring pleasure in the wonder of nature.



p.31 AQA exam-style question

In both ‘Colour Blind’ and ‘Digging’, the speakers describe feelings about nature. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- in ‘Digging’, nature and its associated ‘scents’ gives the speaker the simplicity of being able to focus and think about only one thing at a time; in ‘Colour Blind’ the colours of nature are used to illustrate a political point
- both poems show nature as vibrant and powerful; in ‘Digging’ this is through a range of scents while in ‘Colour Blind’ this is shown through a dramatic range of colours
- both poets present a change to their feelings about nature in the final line; in ‘Digging’ nature shows us that everything is temporary and that everything will pass – just like the seasons; in ‘Colour Blind’ through the colours in the natural world the reader is challenged to consider: if you can see all of these colours, why do you choose to say that you do not notice the colour of my skin?

Pair 2: poem 1: The Deserted House, Alfred Lord Tennyson

p.32–35

p.33 Do it!



- title
- tone
- language
- structure

The adjective ‘Deserted’ in the title makes me think of feelings of emptiness and absence. We are told that ‘light and thought have gone away’ – what does this mean? Why are they ‘Careless tenants’? Why is there an exclamation mark at the end of ‘Careless tenants they!’? Perhaps this suggests that the speaker is angry with the tenants. Why is there a change of tone at the end of the poem? The last line suggests regret.

p.35 Stretch it!



For example:

The speaker's feelings about the house are established in the opening stanza's tone of regret. This regret and overwhelming sense of emptiness is reinforced by language choices that frame everything within the house as absent. Everything has 'gone away', 'doors and windows' have been left 'wide' open – abandoned by the 'careless tenants'. This sense of absence continues in the second stanza. Firstly, there is an absence of light, as all 'within is dark as night' and then we are told there is an absence of sound, 'no murmur at the door'. This focus on absence signals that this was felt to be a vibrant house, which was once full of life and vitality.

p.35 Do it!



Following the speaker's feelings of anger at the 'Careless tenants they!', signalled by the exclamation mark, there is a turning point within the structure and tone of the poem when we reach the final stanza. The tone seems to change with the repetition of 'Come away' as it perhaps becomes less commanding and more pleading. 'Life and thought' no longer live in this house, perhaps suggesting that the house may be seen as a metaphor for a dead body rather than an actual house. This might mean that the whole poem is presenting feelings of grief and regret, instead of merely describing feelings of absence in a deserted house. The structure of the final stanza, with its surprising additional line, seems to support this interpretation of Tennyson's presentation of the speaker's feelings. This disruption of the structure reflects the disruption close relationships face when someone dies. The agony suggested by the pleading tone of 'Would they could have stayed with us' confirms our impression that this poem is showing us the reality of grief and loss.



p.35 AQA exam-style question

In 'The Deserted House', how does the poet present the effects of loss?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- the tone of absence and regret in the opening stanza
- the sense of absence suggested through language choices: loss of light and sound, suggesting loss of vitality
- how the structure of the poem signals a change in the final stanza (is this the death of a person?), suggesting loss through death and resulting grief.

Pair 2: poem 2: Living Space, Imtiaz Dharker

p.36–38

p.38 Do it!



For example:

Within the craziness of the place in Dharker's 'Living Space' with its 'Beams' that 'balance crookedly', Dharker presents a fragile object, 'eggs in a wire basket', that are 'hung out over the dark edge' of this 'slanted universe'. The eggs' fragility probably suggests Dharker's conflicting attitude: the house is both a miracle and a disaster about to happen. In contrast, Tennyson's 'deserted house' is a symbol that conveys his attitude towards life itself. Leaving the reader with the haunting and desperate cry, 'Would they could have stayed with us', suggests Tennyson's fear that life is fragile and temporary.

**p.38 AQA exam-style question**

In both 'The Deserted House' and 'Living Space', the speakers describe their feelings about the idea of home. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- consider how both poets treat the houses as more than buildings: they are like the expressions of the inhabitants' lives and dreams
- explore different poem structures: Tennyson's is formal and regular – like the house (making its neglect sadder); Dharker's is ramshackle and irregular – like the house
- compare and contrast how in both poems the houses/homes are presented as symbols of the inhabitants' lives and values.

Pair 3: poem 1: I Am!, John Clare**p.39–43****p.40 Do it!**

There are lots of different perfectly acceptable answers. Do not simply accept the suggestions below. Compare them with your own ideas.

- What is the poem about?
Someone who feels alone and emotionally and spiritually 'lost'. They feel abandoned by friends. However, they long for complete solitude in a place where they can be close to God.
- What do I notice about the poem's tone or mood?
It is gloomy and pessimistic until the note of hope in the last stanza, but even there the hope is based on the speaker's despair.

p.43 Do it!

For example:

The answer 'hovers' between bands 3 and 4. The comments on the poem are often clear, relevant and thoughtful and are backed up with some careful choices of details from the poem as evidence. However, the effects of these details are never examined very closely, and the student's own language is often too informal to be precise enough. Better subject terminology would support a more precise answer.

p.43 Stretch it!

For example:

...The first verse is a bit confusing though and it's more confusing with all the dashes and interruptions, but that's right really because **it is just like the confusion he is feeling** – his feeling of being lost, so it works really well. I think...

Perceptive observation about the relationship between the poem's form and its meaning, but not expressed clearly enough.

...hinted that God had abandoned him in the first stanza. He sounds even more bitter about being abandoned by his friends and says that it is **being ignored by his 'dearest', closest friends that he finds most bitter...**

Good choice of significant detail; full meaning of the two lines not explored though.

Overall, the poem moves in steps, stanza by stanza. The first one is a bit 'woe is me...they've all gone off and left me'. The next one is this is all torment and a nightmare (or daymare!). The last one is a surprise: he wants to be on his own in a perfect, unspoilt and safe place...

Good recognition of the poem's structure, moving the argument on stanza by stanza.

The answer could be improved by exploring the connotations of a couple of examples of language choices to reveal the subtleties of the speaker’s feelings and what they value. More precise subject terminology would have helped the student to be more precise about language effects, and would have saved time, making some comments more concise.



p.43 AQA exam-style question

In ‘I Am!’, how does the poet presents the speaker’s feelings about friends?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Friends are false and unreliable: they make no attempt to understand the speaker and leave when needed.
- The speaker’s friends even become enemies in that they are part of the world of ‘scorn and noise’.
- The speaker prefers the friendship of God.

Pair 3: poem 2: Woman Work, Maya Angelou

p.44–46



p.46 AQA exam-style question

In both ‘Woman Work’ and ‘I Am!’, the speakers describe feelings about what they want. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- use of rhyme and rhythm for different effects: contradicting mental chaos in ‘I Am!’; mirroring the speaker’s routine, repetitive work in ‘Woman Work’
- use of religious references in both poems to suggest both speakers’ desire to escape into a better, more peaceful life
- images of nature as an alternative to the torment of their ordinary life.

Pair 4: poem 1: Piano, DH Lawrence

p.47–52

p.49 Stretch it!



You will have your own ideas. A few suggestions for the sorts of things you might include are given here:

<p>1 What do I notice about the exam question?</p>	<p>The speaker’s feelings about the past The methods the poet uses and their effect</p>
<p>4 What do I notice about the poem’s tone or mood?</p>	<p>Nostalgic, yearning, grief, feeling helpless</p>
<p>7 Which lines, phrases or words stand out? Why?</p>	<p>‘I weep like a child for the past’ – suddenly rhythmic, the rhythm suggesting being taken over despite his attempt to stay in control ‘taking me back’ – as though the singer has entranced him ‘insidious mastery’ – the effect is crafty, sneaky, overwhelming ‘betrays me back’ – his real feelings have been tricked out of him</p>

<p>8 Do I notice any obvious poetic devices? What is their effect?</p>	<p>Onomatopoeia – suggests childlike simplicity, direct feeling, not filtered by thought</p> <p>Sibilance in first line – hushing, hypnotic</p>
<p>9 What is the poet trying to say?</p>	<p>Music and song ties us to the past/triggers memories of past experiences</p> <p>Remembering the child/person we once were is an emotionally powerful – and sad – experience</p>
<p>10 Is there anything odd or curious in the poem?</p>	<p>‘A woman’, ‘A mother’ (not ‘the’ or ‘my’); strangely impersonal</p> <p>Idea of ‘manhood’. Would a woman not feel the same? What does the speaker associate with ‘manhood’? Does he just mean ‘adulthood’?</p>

p.50 Stretch it!



What is in your plan will depend on the ideas you have. However, the plan should help you focus on both *the speaker’s feelings about the past*, and the *methods* the poet uses. Your plan could include the following:

What		How	When
Introduction		Not just the past, but yearning for his childhood – safety and simplicity?	10.33
Stanza 1	– Yearning	Onomatopoeia (e.g. ‘tingling’) – childish?	10.35
Stanza 2	– Grief/loss of childhood	Occasional rhythm (as though music and memory keep replacing each other)	10.43
Stanza 3	– Willing surrender to past through memory	Sibilance (like a hushing – mother to child?) Explore implications of some words, e.g. ‘betrays’, ‘cosy’	10.51
Final comment			10.58

p.51 Stretch it!



For example:

The speaker in ‘Piano’ presents memory and nostalgia as though it is a tyrant – a force that overpowers and kidnaps the speaker and reduces him to a childish, defeated state. Nostalgia does this not just through its power, but through its cunning too. The effects are disturbing.



p.52 AQA exam-style question

In ‘Piano’, how does the poet present the effects of memory?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- consider how Lawrence presents memory as something physical and overpowering, suggested by the onomatopoeias ‘boom’, ‘tingling’ and other physical references
- memory is triggered by the ‘insidious mastery’ of music; explore how Lawrence develops this idea of memory as crafty, sneaky, irresistible
- memory overpowers and almost humiliates the person who remembers; here a man is made to weep (by implication) like a woman.

Pair 4: poem 2: In Between Days, Raman Munday

p.53–55

p.55 Do it!



For example:

The form of 'In Between Days' is loose and uncontrolled – lines are short but varying in length – and this reflects the speaker's failure even to try to control time, to do anything constructive as it passes. The speaker seems detached and aimless – just like the poem's form. The structure too is loose, based on repetitions of random and varied facts, only emphasising 'waiting'. The form and structure is slippery – just like how the speaker experiences time passing...

By contrast, in 'Piano', the speaker claims to lose control over his feelings and even over time, which is 'upon' him as though he is overwhelmed by it, yet the poem's form and structure are quite controlled. The form is three, four-line stanzas with an AABB rhyme scheme. The structure is based on three rational movements: imagining the past, triggered by the music; his failed attempt to stay in the present; his conclusion ('so...') that resistance is futile/his surrender to the past and his grief for its loss. A number of phrases in the poem perhaps suggest that his defeat is almost unfair...

Precise and insightful comments on the effect of form and structure on the poem's meaning and tone.

Precise signalling of central idea – contrast between the two poems.

Explores subtle implications of a single, simple word choice.

Tentative wording introduces exploratory approach.



p.55 AQA exam-style question

In both 'In Between Days' and 'Piano', the speakers describe feelings about losing control. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Runday suggests feelings of acceptance and resignation; the speaker in 'Piano' also has to resign himself but sounds part-alarmed, part-enthralled at being overpowered.
- The tone of the two poems is different: 'In Between Days' is written informally, almost like prose, suggesting the speaker's resigned attitude. 'Piano' is quite different: its sound effects and its vivid images are more suited to the speaker's awed attitude to nostalgia/memory.

p.56 Essentials, Do it!



- 1 This paper is marked for AO1 and AO2. Context is not included in these assessment objectives.
- 2 You must write about both poems to be awarded marks on this question.

AQA exam-style questions

p.58-63

**p.58 PAIR 1: PRACTICE QUESTION 1**

In 'Catrin', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about her relationship with her child?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- The speaker's presentation of the conflict between mother and daughter is two-way: they are both trying to break away from each other; her mother loves her daughter but perhaps resents her too.
- Explore the poem's form: its short lines, lack of rhyme and punctuation (enjambment) at line endings allow the poem to flow quickly as though the memories are tumbling passionately from the speaker.
- The combination of clear visual memories and metaphors carries the speaker's feelings *and* her attitudes towards her daughter and her experience of motherhood.

**p.59 PAIR 1: PRACTICE QUESTION 2**

In both 'The Playhouse Key' and 'Catrin', the speakers describe their feelings about childhood. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Poignant images/memories in 'The Playhouse Key' reveal the speaker's yearning for childhood/fear of separation from childhood; the theme of separation is more ambivalent in 'Catrin'.
- Use of precise visual images to bring the past to life; images in 'The Playhouse Key' are literal but emotionally charged, whereas they tend to become metaphoric in 'Catrin'.
- Simple rhyme scheme and word choice in 'The Playhouse Key' emphasise a yearning a return to childhood; 'Catrin' is more sophisticated, creating more of an adult perspective.

**p.60 PAIR 2: PRACTICE QUESTION 1**

In 'My Grandmother', how does the poet present the speaker's attitudes to her grandmother?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Trace through the poem the speaker's detached, critical attitude, implied in the idea that the shop kept her grandmother.
- Consider the speaker's view of her grandmother, implied in the central image of reflections and how the furniture gave the grandmother an identity.
- Explore how compassion and guilt are suggested at a turning point in the poem.



p.61 PAIR 2: PRACTICE QUESTION 2

In both 'My Grandmother' and 'Childhood', the speakers describe their attitudes to age. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those attitudes?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Both speakers are to some extent detached from the old person; 'My Grandmother' has almost a tone of contempt; the tone in 'Childhood' is much warmer.
- Both poems use a turning/learning point to reveal the ignorance/arrogance of the young.
- 'Childhood' ends with a surprise that suggests we are *all* helpless in different ways at every stage of our lives, thus attacking the smug arrogance of a youthful view; the old woman helplessness/pointlessness in 'My Grandmother' is confirmed at the end.



p.62 PAIR 3: PRACTICE QUESTION 1

In 'Poem for My Sister,' how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about her little sister?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Trace the warmth in the tone of the poem: 'admire', 'competent'
- The speaker's view of her sister is presented with the focus on her young age and her vulnerability, revealing her need to protect her sister ('*little* sister'), trying to 'warn' her sister about the dangers of 'unsuitable shoes'. Explore the metaphorical meaning: 'unsuitable' shoes used as a metaphor for learning about life through stepping into her sister's shoes; the older sister's love extends to wanting to teach her younger sister about the perils of life; she wants to protect her by showing her how to 'add patches of hard skin'.



p.63 PAIR 3: PRACTICE QUESTION 2

In both 'Poem for My Sister' and 'Nettles', the speakers describe feelings about protecting someone they love. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Some main points you might develop in your answer:

- Both speakers have a close family bond with a younger family member; 'Poem for My sister' explores a warm protective bond with a younger sister; 'Nettles' explores a fiercely protective bond between parent and son that results in a furious reaction towards the nettles.
- Both poems use a learning point to reveal the how the speaker tries to teach the younger family member; in 'Poem for My sister', the sister tries to teach her younger sibling not to make the same mistakes that she did; in 'Nettles' the parent wishes to protect the son, by reacting furiously and in a war-like way, seeking to destroy the elements that could hurt him.
- Both poems use an extended metaphor to explore the problems family members face when trying to protect the ones they love; in 'Poem for My sister', the metaphor uses the idea of walking in someone's shoes to show that the sister can only try to teach and guide and 'wish' that she would remain 'sure footed'; in 'Nettles', the speaker realises that despite destroying the nettles, as time passes 'the sun and rain' would call up 'tall recruits' – more nettles: the speaker cannot protect the son from the 'sharp' wounds that life will bring.