

FACTFILE: GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

STARTING POINTS – SECTION B: UNSEEN POETRY



Section B: Unseen Poetry

In this Unit there are 3 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02 and A05.

A01: Textual Knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of poetry.

This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the poem, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently in a form appropriate to literary studies. Specialist vocabulary should be used where necessary and appropriate. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Poetic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse the poet's use of such poetic methods as form, structure, language and tone. This AO is at the heart of Unit A2 2 Section B.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in poems. This means identifying poetic methods such as form, structure and particular uses of language, and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing poetic methods – advice to teachers and students:

The poetic method should be:

identified – using appropriate terminology;

illustrated – quotation will be expected and this should be relevant and sufficient to illustrate the feature in full. It should observe the layout of the original text, and should follow the conventions with regard to smooth and syntactically appropriate combining of the quotation with the student's own words;

analysed – so as to show that the student understands its operation and effect;

related – to the key term of the question.



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Use of the terms “image” and “imagery”

For our purposes in this section “images” and “imagery” are to be sought and found in the language of the poems, and not in the mind of the reader. The student should be discouraged from such formulations as “In this poem the reader has the image of nature as a destroying force” where “image” is really being used to mean impression. For the purpose of AO2 analysis in this section, what we mean by “image” is figures of speech, where the “figure” (simile, metaphor, personification etc.) has a significance more than literal. Where there is no such significance, the student might be advised to use a term such as detailing.

Use of the term “tone”

Tone is usually understood as the poet’s words in combination with his or her attitude towards subject matter and/or reader. It may be considered both in the light of a poetic method and as an effect of other methods e.g. diction, syntax. Tone, if it is to be handled productively, requires careful treatment. As with all methods, the tone must be:

identified – here no specialist vocabulary is needed, merely a precisely chosen adjective or adjective phrase (e.g. acerbic, admiring, mocking);

illustrated – a full and apt quotation should be selected, and presented correctly,

analysed – the use of language in the quotation should be analysed to demonstrate that the student understands how the tone is achieved;

related – to the key term of the question.

The importance of shifts of tone as a structural device (in e.g. contrast, characterization or development) should be understood by students.

Tone should be treated in the same rigorous way as any other poetic method.

A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should be able to explore a poem informed by different interpretations. He/she should offer opinions or judgments in response to the poem, providing textual referencing to illustrate these opinions.

He/she should make an attempt at reasoning in support of his/her opinions (rather than simple assertion) whilst showing an awareness that alternative readings or interpretations can also be valid.

Opinions of critics/commentators will not be necessary.

