

FACTFILE: GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

STARTING POINTS – SECTION A: POETRY 1900 – PRESENT



Section A: The Study of Poetry 1900 – Present

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A04.

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 poems, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. 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.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in poems. This means identifying poetic methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which poetry is written and received. In this unit the stipulated context will be biographical. It should be relevant to the question.

Contextual information of the stipulated type which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A04: Connections connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections between poems.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.



Robert Frost

A02: Poetic Methods

Form and structure

- Use of experimental rhyme schemes, 'Playing tennis with the net down';
- Sonnet form, *Into My Own*, *Mowing*;
- Internal rhyme, *Mowing*;
- Dramatic monologue, *After Apple-Picking*, *Mending Wall*;
- Blank verse, *Mending Wall*, *Birches*;
- Rhyming quintains, *The Road Not Taken*;
- Terza rima, *Acquainted With The Night*; and
- Lyric, *For Once, Then, Something*

Language

- Assonance, *Mending Wall*, "Out, Out-";
- Alliteration, *The Road Not Taken*;
- Frost's 'Sound of sense';
- Biblical and literary allusions, *After Apple-Picking*, "Out, Out-". Imagery of rural life, *Mending Wall*, *After Apple-Picking*, *Birches*, *Mowing*;
- Use of Simile, *Going For Water*, *Mending Wall*;
- Personification, *Mowing*;
- Onomatopoeia, *Going For Water*;
- Symbolism, *Into My Own*, *The Road Not Taken*;
- Frost's notion of 'ulteriority'; and
- New England vernacular and adages, *Mowing*, *Into My Own* and *Mending Wall*

Tone

- Tonal shifts, *Going For Water*;
- Relaxed, conversational, *Mending Wall*; and
- Reflective, *Desert Places*

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text in a context response.

- Born in 1874 in San Francisco;
- Moved to Massachusetts when his father died;
- In 1900, moved with his wife and children to a farm in New Hampshire. He attempted to make a life on it for the next 12 years;
- Frost and Elinor tried several endeavours including poultry farming, all of which were fairly unsuccessful;
- During this time two of Frost's children died;
- Moved to England in 1912 and befriended many British poets and writers;
- Upon his return to New England Frost worked as a lecturer; and
- In later life Frost's work acquired popular and critical success, he won the Pulitzer Prize several times



Seamus Heaney

A02: Poetic methods

Form and structure

- Use of quatrains
- Tercets, '*Had I not been Awake*,' *The Conway Stewart*;
- *Personal Helicon*, *The Peninsula*, *Bogland*;
- Sonnet, *The Forge*;
- Free verse, *Bogland*, *The Conway Stewart*;
- Rhyming couplets, *The Wife's Tale*; and
- Enjambment, *The Harvest Bow*

Language

- Allegory, '*Had I not been Awake*;'
- Alliteration, '*Had I not been Awake*,' *The Conway Stewart*;
- Allusion to Greek mythology, *Personal Helicon*;
- Assonance, *Personal Helicon*;
- Caesura, *Personal Helicon*;
- Direct speech, *The Wife's Tale*;
- Metaphor, *The Summer of Lost Rachel*, *The Conway Stewart*;
- Sensory imagery, *The Forge*;
- Symbolism, *Bogland*;
- Use of colloquial language; and
- Repetition, *Postscript*

Tone

- Relaxed, conversational, *The Wife's Tale*;
- Contemplative, *Personal Helicon*, '*Had I not been Awake*,' and
- Admiration for nature, *The Peninsula*

A03: Contexts

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- Born into a farming family in rural Northern Ireland;
- Attend boarding school in St. Columb's College, Derry;
- Graduated from Queens University in Belfast 1966;
- Worked as a schoolteacher and college lecturer;
- Married Marie Devlin, fellow writer who would figure prominently in Heaney's work;
- He wrote about love, mythology, memory, particularly on his own rural upbringing, and human relationships;
- He also provided commentary on the 'Troubles' in his work; and
- He won the Nobel Prize for literature.



Seamus Heaney

A04: Connections

- Focus on family and tradition, *The Harvest Bow*, *Mending Wall*;
- Childhood experiences, *Birches*, “*Out Out-*,” *Personal Helicon*, *The Railway Children*;
- Self-discovery, *Personal Helicon*, *Birches*;
- Poetic inspiration, *Personal Helicon*, *After Apple-Picking*;
- The Creative process, *The Peninsula*, *The Forge*, *Mowing*;
- Nature, *The Peninsula*, *Postscript*, *Mowing*, *Birches*;
- Rural Life, *Mowing*, *The Harvest Bow*, *The Wife’s Tale*, *After Apple-Picking*, *Mending Wall*;
- The Past, *The Forge*, *Bogland*, *Mending Wall*;
- Grief and Loss, *The Summer of Lost Rachel*, *Acquainted With The Night*, “*Out Out-*,” *Desert Places*; and
- Journeys, *Acquainted With The Night*, *The Peninsula*, *Postscript*



Ted Hughes

A02: Poetic Methods

Form and Structure

- Quatrains, *Wind*;
- Chronological order, *Wind*;
- Enjambment, *Wind*, *The Thought-Fox*;
- Irregular line lengths, *Hawk Roosting*;
- Free verse, *Wodwo*;
- Dramatic monologue, *Hawk Roosting*; and
- Lyric – *Crow Sickened*

Language

- Imagery of nature, *Pike*;
- Metaphor, *Hawk Roosting*, *Wind*, *Lovesong*;
- Alliteration, *The Thought-Fox*;
- Symbolism, *Hawk Roosting*;
- Onomatopoeia, *Wind*;
- Personification, *Wind*;
- Use of mythological figures, *Wodwo*;
- Inverted word order, *Crow Sickened*
- Repetition, *Hawk Roosting*; and
- Monosyllabic, pared down language, *Pike*

Tone

- Ominous, *Hawk Roosting*;
- Angry, *Crow Sickened*;
- Tense and strained, *Wind*; and
- Awe, *Full Moon and Little Frieda*, *Pike*, *Roe-Deer*

A03: Contexts

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- Ted Hughes grew up in South Yorkshire, and the landscape of that area informed much of his poetry;
- Interested in animism, many of his poems feature animals;
- He studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University;
- He married fellow poet Sylvia Plath, who later committed suicide;
- *Birthday Letters* was his poetic response to Sylvia Plath's suicide; and
- He became poet Laureate in 1984



Sylvia Plath

A02: Poetic methods

Form and Structure

- Apostrophe, *Poppies in July*;
- Lyric, *Mirror*;
- Free verse, *Mirror*, *Tulips*;
- Use of slant rhyme, *Mirror*, *Ariel*;
- Enjambement, *Ariel*;
- Iambic metre, *Tulips*;
- Tercets, *Lady Lazarus*, *Ariel*;
- Mixture of exact and slant rhyme, *Lady Lazarus*;
- Anaphora, *Lady Lazarus*;
- Couplets, *The Night Dances*, *Poppies in July*; and
- Caesura, *The Colossus*

Language

- Assonance and consonance, *The Night Dances*, *Ariel*, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, *Contusion*;
- Use of first person, confessional poetry;
- Imagery of water, *Mirror*;
- Personification, *Mirror*, *Tulips*, *Blackberrying*;
- Metaphor, *Mirror*, *Ariel*, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*;
- Repetition, *Mirror*;
- Simile, *Tulips*, *The Night Dances*;
- Precise use of language, *Mirror*;
- Imagery of light/dark, *Sheep in Fog*;
- Imagery of holocaust/carnival, *Lady Lazarus*, *Daddy*;
- Brutal and intense imagery, *Lady Lazarus*;
- Literary, biblical and philosophical allusions, *Lady Lazarus*;
- Objectification of people, *Tulips*;
- Synaesthesia, *Tulips*;
- Use of second person, *Daddy*, *The Colossus*; and
- Onomatopoeia, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*

Tone

- Ominous, *Sheep in Fog*;
- Angry, vitriolic, *Lady Lazarus*, *Daddy*;
- Detached, *Tulips*, *Contusion*; and
- Tonal shifts, *Ariel*, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*



Sylvia Plath

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text in a context response.

- Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, USA and grew up in a comfortable middle-class home;
- Her father died when she was eight;
- She went to university in Boston and Cambridge, England. Plath was an excellent student;
- She suffered a nervous breakdown in college. She suffered from periods of depression for the rest of her life. Many of her poems are a terrifying record of her depression;
- At Cambridge University she met and married Ted Hughes;
- They settled in England and had two children. Then the marriage ended;
- In 1962 Plath started bee keeping. Her father was a beekeeper and had written two books about bees; and
- She committed suicide at the age of thirty in 1963

A04: Connections

- Loss, *The Colossus*;
- Death, *Contusion*;
- Loneliness, *Contusion*, *Blackberrying*;
- Desperation, *Contusion*;
- Relationships, *Poppies in July*, *Lovesong*;
- Nature, *Sheep in Fog*, *Blackberrying*, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, *Woodwo*, *Roe-Deer*;
- The Creative process, *The Thought-Fox*, *Ariel*;
- Family, *The Night Dances*, *Full Moon and Little Frieda*;
- Fear, *Wind*, *Tulips*; and
- Animism, *Ariel*, *Hawk Roosting*



Elizabeth Jennings

A02: Poetic Methods

Form and Structure

- Lyric, *Absence*;
- Quintet, *Absence*;
- Simplicity of metre and rhyme;
- Heroic couplet, *One Flesh*;
- Iambic Pentametre, *Absence*, *My Grandmother*;
- Regular rhyme scheme, *One Flesh*, *Absence*, *My Grandmother*; and
- Enjambment, *Letter from Assisi*, *Song At The Beginning of Autumn*

Language

- Simile, *One Flesh*;
- Repetition, *One Flesh*;
- Sibilance, *One Flesh*;
- Metaphor, *One Flesh*;
- Simple direct style of language, *Absence*;
- Personification, *My Grandmother*; and
- Alliteration, *My Grandmother*

Tone

- Melancholic, *One Flesh*; and
- Tonal shifts, from sardonic to melancholy, *Absence*

A03: Contexts

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- Elizabeth Jennings was a well-educated English woman who worked in publishing and as a librarian;
- She was born in 1926 and died in 2002;
- She is often associated with 'The Movement', a collective that included Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin;
- In the mid-1960s she suffered a nervous breakdown which required hospitalisation; and
- She was a devout Catholic and religion is an important theme in much of her work. She explores suffering, relationships, loneliness and religious faith.



Philip Larkin

A02: Poetic Methods

Form and Structure

- Iambic pentameter, *Church Going*, *Faith Healing*;
- Regular rhyme scheme, *Church Going*, *Love Songs in Age*, *Faith Healing*, *The Whitsun Weddings*;
- Lyrical Ballad, *Love Songs in Age*;
- Tercets, *Talking in Bed*, *The Explosion*; and
- Elegy, *The Explosion*

Language

- Alliteration, *Church Going*, *Faith Healing*;
- Assonance, *The Explosion*, *Love Songs in Age*;
- Antithesis, *Faith Healing*;
- Anthromorphism, *Faith Healing*;
- Caesura, *Love Songs in Age*, *For Sidney Bechet*;
- Colloquial language, *High Windows*;
- Direct speech, *Dockery and Son*;
- Enjambement, *Church Going*, *Love Songs in Age*, *The Whitsun Weddings*, *High Windows*;
- Imagery of Light, *Love Songs in Age*;
- Personification, *The Explosion*;
- Imagery of rain/tears, *Faith Healing*;
- Metaphor, *Faith Healing*, *Talking in Bed*, *Dockery and Son*, *Solar*;
- Metonym, *Church Going*;
- Onomatopoeia, *Church Going*;
- Questions, *Dockery and Son*, *The Old Fools*;
- Sensory imagery, *The Whitsun Weddings*;
- Sibilance, *The Whitsun Weddings*;
- Simile, *For Sidney Bechet*, *High Windows*;
- Symbolism; and
- Triad, *Church Going*

Tone

- Questioning, *Church Going*;
- Impersonal, *The Explosion*;
- Ironic, *Church Going*;
- Conversational, *Church Going*;
- Witty, *Church Going*;
- Pessimistic, *Church Going*, *Love Songs in Age*;
- Sarcastic, *Faith Healing*;
- Cynical, *The Whitsun Weddings*; and
- Melancholic, *Dockery and Son*



Philip Larkin

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text in a context response.

- Born in Coventry in 1922;
- He studied at Oxford and later became a librarian;
- He became the preeminent poet of his generation, and a leading voice of 'The Movement';
- Larkin employed the traditional tools of poetry—rhyme, stanza, and meter—to explore the often uncomfortable or terrifying experiences of the modern age; and
- Deeply anti-social and a great lover of American jazz, Larkin never married and continued to work as a librarian in Hull, where he died in 1985

A04: Connections

- Aging, *High Windows*, *Love Songs in Age*, *The Old Fools*, *One Flesh* and *My Grandmother*;
- Religion and human nature, *Faith Healing*, *The Whitsun Weddings*, *The Annunciation*;
- Distances, *High Windows*;
- Death, *Dockery and Son*, *My Grandmother*;
- Creativity, *Dockery and Son*;
- Relationships, *Talking in Bed*, *The Whitsun Weddings*, *One Flesh*, *Absence*;
- Disappointment in Love, *Love Songs in Age*, *Faith Healing*, *Talking in Bed*, *One Flesh*;
- Journeys, *The Whitsun Weddings*; and
- Family, *My Grandmother*, *Dockery and Son*



Eavan Boland

A02: Poetic methods

Form and structure

- Indented layout, *How we Made a New Art on Old Ground*;
- Free verse, *Amethyst Beads*, *This Moment*;
- Enjambment, *Amethyst beads*, *The Journey* and *Ode to Suburbia*;
- Lyric, *Love and This Moment*; and
- Ode, *Ode to Suburbia*

Language

- Alliteration, *Anorexic* and *Ode to Suburbia*;
- Assonance, *This Moment*;
- Imagery of nature, *How we Made a New Art on Old Ground*;
- Imagery of the mind and body, *Anorexic*;
- Imagery of water, *And Soul*;
- Literary, biblical and mythological allusions, *The Journey*, *Anorexic*, *Love*;
- Metaphor, *Witness*;
- Personification, *Love*;
- Repetition, *This Moment*; and
- Sibilance, *This Moment*



Eavan Boland

Tone

- Angry, *Anorexic*;
- Reflective, *And Soul*;
- Detached, *This Moment*; and
- Despair, *Ode to Suburbia*

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text in a context response.

- Born in was born in Dublin in 1944;
- Moved to London in 1950 with her family, where Boland first experienced anti-Irish sentiment;
- Returned to Dublin and studied at Trinity College;
- After graduating, she held numerous teaching positions and published poetry, prose criticism and essays;
- Boland married the novelist Kevin Casey in 1969 and has two daughters;
- Boland's early work is informed by her experiences as a wife and mother;
- Her work also explores the role of women in Irish history and culture;
- Since 1996 she has been a Professor of English at Stanford University; and
- Over the course of her long career, Eavan Boland has emerged as one of the foremost female voices in Irish literature



Jean Bleakney

A02: Poetic methods

Form and structure

- Ekphrasis, *Csontváry's Flowers*;
- Sonnet, *Donegal Sightings*;
- Epistle, *Consolidation, A Watery City*;
- Rhyming couplets, *Notes for the Almanac*;
- Triplets, *Self-Portraits With Measuring Tape*;
- Internal rhyme, *Out To Tender*; and
- Dramatic monologue, *How Can You Say That?*

Language

- Alliteration, *Spring*;
- Assonance, *Spring, Nightscapes, Donegal Sightings*;
- Colloquial speech, *Out To Tender, How Can You Say That?*;
- Metaphor, *Breaking the Surface, Nightscapes*;
- Extended metaphor, *Spring*;
- Onomatopoeia, *Winterisation*;
- Personification, *Notes for the Almanac*;
- Simile, *Consolidation, Winterisation, Donegal Sightings*; and
- Biological and horticultural vocabulary, *Spring, Out To Tender*



Jean Bleakney

Tone

- Regret, *Spring*;
- Reflective, *Consolidation*, *Winterisation*;
- Light hearted, *How Can You Say That?*;
- Awe and wonder, *Csontváry's Flowers*;
- Apprehensive, *Out To Tender*; and
- Wry fatalism, *Self-Portraits with Measuring Tape*

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text in a context response.

- Born in 1956 in Newry, the daughter of a Customs Officer;
- Moved to Greater Belfast area in 1973;
- Studied Biochemistry at Queen's University Belfast and worked in medical research for 8 years;
- After the birth of her second child, she stayed at home and discovered gardening and poetry;
- Began attending Creative Writing Group at Queen's in 1993;
- Worked as garden centre assistant for over 20 years;
- Holidays in south west Donegal; and
- Her vocabulary draws from botany and horticulture as well as the physical sciences, offering fresh angles on the domestic and wider world

A04: Connections

- Time, *Spring*, *The Journey*;
- Memories, *Consolidation*, *And Soul*
- Family, *Consolidation*, *This Moment*, *Ode to Suburbia*;
- Nature, *Spring*, *Consolidation*, *How we Made a New Art on Old Ground*;
- Love, *How can you say that*, *Love*;
- Journeys, *A Watery City*, *The Journey*;
- Art and the creative process, *Csontváry's Flowers*, *The Singers*, *Is it Still the Same*;
- Change, *Csontváry's Flowers*, *Is it Still the Same*;
- Death, *Winterisation*, *And Soul*, *This Moment*, *The Journey*;
- Politics and history, *Out To Tender*, *How we Made a New Art on Old Ground*; and
- Transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, *Amethyst Beads*, *Consolidation*

