



Rewarding Learning

eGUIDE//English Literature

The Study of Poetry Pre 1900

Unit A2 2

William Blake

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Starting Point

In this Unit you will explore 15 of William Blake's poems (listed in Appendix 1).

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 Assessment Objective (AO) involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the poem or poems, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. 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 analyze the poet's use of such poetic methods as form, structure, language and tone. **This AO is the driver of Unit A2 2: Section A and is of primary importance.**

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 students:

1. The poetic method should be:

identified, using appropriate terminology if possible;

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; and

related to the key term of the question.

2. 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 A02 analysis in this section, what we mean by “image” is a figure 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.

3. Use of the term “tone”

Tone is usually understood as the poet’s words in combination with his or her attitude towards subject 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. This feature, 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;

analysed – so as to demonstrate that the student understands how the tone is achieved (e.g. through a consideration of the syntactical features of the quotation offered); and

related to the key term of the question.

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

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 by drawing on appropriate information from outside the poem(s).

No specific sources are prescribed or recommended. Nevertheless, the questions address a contextual issue – social, cultural, historical, biographical, or literary – and candidates will be expected to provide appropriate information from outside the text. Contextual information of the stipulated type which is made relevant to the key term 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.

To meet the requirements of this Assessment Objective, you must:

- **Demonstrate knowledge of the context which shaped the poems** – this could include social, cultural, historical, biographical and/or literary detail.
- **Comment on the significance of chosen contextual information** – link your selected contextual details to their impact on the poems’ intention and/or creation.
- **Use only relevant contextual information appropriately applied** – as stated before, it is important to focus on what is actually asked and shape your information accordingly.

Be aware that while context is important in consolidating our understanding of the poetry, you should not overuse contextual information, especially at the expense of



textual analysis. A few contextual details, succinctly expressed and strictly related to the question, are far superior to entire paragraphs on the world outside of the poem(s).

A04: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections between and within poems discussing features such as similarities, contrasts, continuity and development in the handling of themes and poetic techniques, and in context. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded.

The following is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students as they begin to explore Blake's poetry. Students should be encouraged to be flexible in their thinking, realising for example that the text is likely to embody more than one theme, or that a writer's preoccupation may not receive explicit statement in a poem.



A01: Textual knowledge and understanding

As you read this guide, you will begin to develop knowledge and understanding of meaning and form your own interpretations of the poems. This guide will suggest areas for discussion and further research. You will need to adapt knowledge and understanding in order to frame an examination response that is relevant to the key terms of the question. You will need to support your ideas with relevant reference to the text, and present logical interpretations. You will need to use accurate and clear language and appropriate literary terms.

William Blake is almost universally described in terms such as “visionary” and “genius”, and as a man whose ideas and work were “before his time”. Broadly speaking, the first designation has both literal and figurative truth; the other two point to the fact that he was largely unappreciated in his lifetime yet went on to inspire generations of artists, musicians, writers and others throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and into the new millennium.

His philosophies were complex, and part of the continuing fascination felt for his work lies in the fact that it resists simplistic interpretation, even after generations of scholarship devoted to decoding it. While this could seem intimidating, it actually represents a great opportunity for students approaching Blake’s poetry; the deceptively simple compositions afford you ample scope to examine and present a range of critical readings and demonstrate extensive subject knowledge.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience

It’s hard to be certain because of the lengthy production process and Blake’s habit of revising his books with each new printing, but critics generally agree that *Songs of Innocence* was published first as a collection in 1789; *Songs of Experience* followed in 1793 and the two were presented together as one volume for the first time in 1794, with the subtitle *Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. The initial volumes comprised 19 and 26 poems respectively, though this was not a fixed arrangement when the two were published together and Blake moved some of the poems from one section to the other on more than one occasion.

Books at this time, particularly those few aimed at children, might have decorative borders or illustrations, but the concept behind *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is somewhat different. Blake conceived of the illustrations not as mere decoration but as intrinsic to the meaning of each written piece, and so they (text and illustration) were integrated and presented as complete engravings. Each design was cut into metal plates to enable a print to be made which would be coloured by hand, and each plate included the design and the poem itself, written ‘backwards’, that is to say in mirror writing, in order to show up the correct way round. The process was difficult and time-consuming, but Blake tackled it patiently, helped by his wife Catherine, and grew skilled in the necessary mirroring of the text. Presentation of his vision mattered to him – hence not only this painstaking process but also his seemingly incessant tinkering with the running



order and arrangement of the poems. The early versions of *Songs* were all hand-produced using Blake's engraving method; no two were exactly alike, and most were sold or given to friends and patrons in the first instance.

Blake liked to say his work was better understood by children than by adults, but this was more to do with his belief in children's unspoiled and unsophisticated purity of perception – they were more likely to read the poems simply and form uncluttered ideas about them, in his opinion, than adults were, which again reflects his views about the interplay between innocence and experience. The work was not explicitly aimed at a child audience; rather he used some of the conventions of literature for children as a springboard from which to create the atmosphere of childhood for an adult audience and encourage them to re-experience situations through a child's eyes as well as their own. In doing so, readers were positioned to view the text from the dual vantage points of experience and of innocence, encountering Blake's text as he had intended.

Themes

Themes within Blake's poetry include, but are not limited to:

Childhood

The purity and sweetness of children in an unspoiled state, and their vulnerability to the harsher experiences of life as epitomised in works like 'The Chimney Sweeper'; the ways in which parents, custodians and society can protect or fail to protect their innocence; the idea of drawing attention to the unheard voices of children, who were one of the most disenfranchised groups in society, as a way of offering new perspectives for the reader as well as exposing the difficulties faced by the young.

Authority

The need for questioning of authority, be it that of church, state, educational or commercial interests, and the need to raise awareness of unacceptable conditions and challenge or rebel against the status quo in the interests of greater freedom and fairness.

Humanity and Divinity

The juxtaposition of and interplay between God as creator and the humans made in his image, particularly in view of his belief that "Every thing that lives is holy". Blake was an admirer of John Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* has been argued to portray the 'fallen angel' Satan as a kind of renegade hero or anti-hero rather than the outright villain of the piece; he was interested in the immense potential humans have to perpetrate both good works and bad, and the role of God in this complicated pattern.

Corruption of Innocence

In conceiving of innocence and experience as "two contrary states of the human soul", Blake does not favour one over the other. His recounting of various unpleasant and upsetting situations in the 'Experience' portion of his poetry does not translate into him wishing everyone a life of ignorant, naïve bliss – rather, he finds both innocence and experience to be inherent in and important for every person's development and understanding. The corruption of innocence, however, when used for the ends of others, was thoroughly unacceptable to Blake and this is a recurring, often woeful, theme in these poems. Linked to this are prevalent Christian ideas about the nature of humanity itself in the light of the Bible's telling of the 'Fall' of Adam and Eve, ideas of original sin and the contrast between the divine 'pre-Lapsarian' state and the subsequent life of hardship once the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil had been eaten by the 'first'



man and woman. It is perhaps worth reading or re-familiarizing yourself with the details of this Bible story and keeping it in mind while studying the poems; it is the epitome of innocence/experience stories and gives a useful framework for considering much of Blake's work.

Reason and Imagination

Blake perceived the tendency to exalt science, logic and reason, an attitude that was culturally prevalent at the time (see 'The Age of Reason' in Context section) as shortcomings and failures of his society; his belief in the importance of creativity, imagination and spirituality for fulfilment in life and his conviction that imagination brought out the divine side of human nature.

Summary of the poems

Remember that the 15 poems chosen for study and listed here are only a selection from each of the two books.

Songs of Innocence

Infant Joy

A newborn baby engages in a dialogue with an adult, presumably his or her mother (an interpretation at least partially borne out by the accompanying image); it is a tender scene in which the child expresses happiness and the mother wishes "*Sweet joy*" for his or her future. The poem is brief – just two stanzas – and the language almost exclusively monosyllabic, with no more than six syllables per line, but it doesn't feel sparse or clipped. Instead, the simplicity and repetition of the language tries to catch the voice of a pre-verbal child who is the epitome of innocence. The baby's answer to the question of a name simultaneously evokes a child learning to talk, reminds us of the complex relationship between the act of being and the act of naming and sums up the child's pure unspoiled state – he or she is a thing made solely of happiness and joy.

The Lamb

With possible allusions to 'Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild' from Wesley's Hymns for Children (1763), 'The Lamb' is acknowledged by Essick as being "in many ways the quintessential song of Innocence" and forms a kind of analogue or counterpart to 'The Tyger'. The poem sees a child address a lamb, initially whimsically questioning it but then revealing the answer as well; the child is sure of him- or herself and of the role Jesus has played in creating the lamb with its "*tender voice*" and "*clothing of delight*". Blake sets the child apart from the doctrine of Original Sin and creates an alignment between the lamb, the child and Jesus – all of them meek and mild, all of them "*called by thy name*". This connection is furthered by the accompanying illustration – a child, a lamb and a shepherd are depicted, all of these references to the persona of Jesus in the Bible – and also by the rhyming couplets and repetitions of syntax and diction throughout which help contribute to the gentle, unselfconscious tone. The lamb itself is a frequent motif in Blake's work (see 'A04 Connections'), associated with light and innocence.

Holy Thursday

A procession of charity-school children marches into the "*high dome*" of St Paul's Cathedral; it's an annual trip undertaken so that they may sing hymns and offer thanks to their benefactors. They are led by old "*Grey-headed beadle*" who carry white staffs – the image of shepherd and flock is strengthened when the children are deemed "*multitudes of lambs*". The speaker describes seeing them as if from a distance and twice designates them as "*innocent*" – he is clearly an adult observer, different from them and from the



voices of other speakers in the other poems of 'Innocence'; his rhetoric is grander, his lines longer and his language more developed, consciously using polysyllables like "*harmonious thunderings*" and more formal syntax like "*they raise to heaven the voice of song*". The clearly separate identity of this observing adult and his self-aware tone allows us the possibility of detecting irony in his reference to the "*wise guardians of the poor*" and his advice that we "*cherish pity*". There is perhaps a sense that the children are in receipt of a most patronising kind of charity at the hands of the self-satisfied benefactors, who feel churlishly entitled to the conformity and humility of their young wards rather than charitably supporting them for the sake of the chance to help nurture their spirits. The allusion to driving an angel from the door is linked to a long tradition holding hospitality to be a sacred virtue and citing the possibility that celestial beings (gods in Greek mythology, angels in Christianity) may appear in disguise at your door and treat you as well as the welcome you show them. Blake here seems to suggest the children – who are certainly more fortunate than the chimney sweepers, for example, as they have "*innocent faces clean*" and the chance of an education – deserve still better treatment: the common respect one would give to a guest, rather than being forced to participate in a pantomime of gratitude.

The Chimney Sweeper

The plight of child chimney sweepers was well known to Londoners at the time of this poem's writing and provides Blake with a recognisable and visually striking setting for some of his most direct engagement in social issues of the whole volume. The speaker was sold to a master sweep at a time when he was so young he could barely utter the signature cry of "sweep! sweep!" by which the workers identified their services – here Blake characterises his lispng attempt with the loaded mispronunciation "*weep! 'weep!*" The tale of Tom Dacre's dream is a strange one in terms of innocence – we can argue that Tom being made "*happy & warm*" by his dream of freedom suggests his innocence has been preserved to some degree, yet the physical conditions in which he lives will soon affect him even if he is mentally intact. Perhaps the metaphor of his shorn white hair also applies to his innocence – it has been preserved but can no longer do him any service. The uneasy tone of the final sentence opens the way to 'Songs of Experience' – whose "*duty*" Blake means, and how heavy his irony is in saying so, are points to be considered carefully.

The Little Black Boy

Blake's abhorrence of slavery here takes the form not of an explicit description of its terrible conditions or specific injustices, but instead an intimate portrait of a moment between mother and child. The humanity inherent in the portrait of a loving relationship and the invocation of God as the father of all is underlaid with a slightly barbed reminder to a white audience that these people, too, are God's children, despite their black skin. It's never clarified whether or not the boy and his mother are slaves, but he is nonetheless aware of white English boys as well as of the hegemonic European connotations of white and black as 'clean/good' and 'dirty/evil' respectively. He has already indicated some level of shame in his blackness with the lament "*O!*" before he assures us his soul, at least, is white. His mother is one of the few loving parent figures appearing in these poems; she inverts the narrative of his race, claiming his blackness just enables him to go closer to the sun and thus, metaphorically, closer to God's love. He further conjures the role of protector for himself, imagining that he will help to shield the little white boy from the heaviest rays of God's love and light until he can bear them alone. His innocent assumption that the little white boy will "*love*" him for this can be read as either an ideal model for a state of equality or as bitterly ironic.



The Ecchoing Green

This portrait of youth and age in harmony with one another revolves around the village green on which successive generations of children play. It is an idyllic setting characterised by the Spring season, the birdsong and the “*cheerful*” sound of the bell as the girls and boys play, observed by Old John, who is neither jealous of their youth nor crotchety with age. He does “*laugh away care*” and fondly relates how he played just as they do. Essick asserts that “In the state of innocence, the echo is not mere repetition but becomes another metaphor for unity”, since it is a response from the landscape to sounds of life and alludes to the echoes of history in which the life cycles of a close community naturally progress. The sense of a cycle of time is echoed by the poem’s structure too – the first stanza depicts morning time, the second mid-day when the adults seek the shade of the tree, and the last closes in evening as all good things come to an end and the children return to their parents’ guardianship. The green may be “*darkening*” at the end of the day but it will be renewed afresh for the next morning’s playtime; the children are innocent of the potential horrors faced by Blake’s other young characters and the passage of time is, for them, nothing to be feared.

Songs of Experience

Introduction

The tone is set for *Songs of Experience* with this ambiguous ‘reveille’ to the Earth. Its Biblical allusions and imperative opening exclamation to “*Hear the voice of the Bard!*” do not conceal the fact that the meaning is unclear. Critics disagree on a number of points: whether the Bard is Blake himself, a Biblical prophet or another party; whether he speaks the “*Holy Word*” on behalf of a loving creator who laments for his charges or a religious dictator who seeks to judge and control them; whether or not the Bard’s intentions for humankind are pure or a way of increasing authoritarian religious control over them; even the symbolic meanings of the references to nature. Some, for instance, see the “*starry pole*” as the Pole Star, a kind of guiding light; others believe it to be a cloaked reference to science (astronomy being a key area of study in the Enlightenment) and, in Blake’s eyes, not to be trusted. The complicated nature of the possible meanings of the poem reflects the problems inherent in experience itself – uncertainty, doubt, personal responsibility for action and the need to question authority. The “*lapsed*” state of humanity is underscored with references to those who “*Turn away*” and are “*fallen*”, yet the ambiguity of the speaker’s identity and intentions make it harder to accept at face value the promises that people can “*Arise*” and “*renew*”, and the seemingly conditional offer given in the final stanza.

Infant Sorrow

Having been born into a “*dangerous world*”, the infant speaker in this poem is instantly struggling to escape it, squirming to be free of the parental grasp and the swaddling bands, seemingly determined to get away. It isn’t clear what exactly has prompted this reaction, though it’s clear the birth is traumatic – the mother groans in pain (pain in childbirth, according to the Bible, was a punishment for the lapsed Eve that was extended to all women through the idea of Original Sin), the father answers her with weeping and the baby arrives. The verb chosen to convey his or her entry into the world, “*leapt*”, could convey a sense of daring and dynamism that marks the child as brave and independent or could instead suggest there was no other option than a leap of faith. The baby is “*piping loud/ Like a fiend hid in a cloud*”, a simile suggesting the arrival of something malevolent. This inversion of the pleasant scenes in ‘Infant Joy’, when mother and baby share a sweet and loving moment, is steeped in the kind of grim struggle that is very much corporeal rather than spiritual, marked by physical exertion and suffering – the child has spirit and



is a fighter, but the world quickly wears this spirit down, leaving the baby resigned to helplessly “*sulk*” about the lot in life that he or she already seems to realise may represent a crushing weight or burden.

The Tyger

One of Blake’s best known poems, it is also a remarkable example of the early threads of a fascination with ancient mythos and the origins of religion that Blake would later weave into works like *The Four Zoas*. It forms a stunning contrast to its ‘partner’ poem, because if ‘The Lamb’ itself along with the child and shepherd all symbolised a loving, gentle, redemptive Christ, ‘The Tyger’ is a very different beast both literally and figuratively. If it is a creation of God, it is certainly the Old Testament God of plagues, floods and fury rather than the forgiving father-figure found elsewhere in Blake’s work. More likely, though, is some primeval pagan creator, a wild and savage god from the “*forests of the night*”, for such a fearsome beast – Blake hints at as much in his imagery. His allusion to a hand that “*dare seize the fire*” could refer to Prometheus, the man who stole fire from the gods of Mount Olympus and gave it, vital and dangerous, to mankind. From this Greek myth it is a small leap to imagine Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire, metal and blacksmiths, among the references to hammer, anvil and furnace, “*immortal hand*” and in the location of “*distant deeps*” since he worked underground (this interpretation also suggests a self-referential knowing nod to the poet himself, who also ‘created’ the Tyger in word and image, hammering the engraving plates and inking the “*fire of thine eyes*” and literally framing the “*fearful symmetry*”). Whoever has created the Tyger, he is an absentee father – the speaker’s many questions go unanswered; we cannot say for certain whether or not “*he who made the Lamb*” also conjured and forged this thing of “*deadly terrors*” and fearsome, striking beauty.

Holy Thursday

Perhaps more closely aligned to its opposite than any other of the poems, this ‘Holy Thursday’ has a rather different emphasis. Alone, it is a heartfelt but somewhat unfocused exclamation on the shameful of children living in poverty; taken in conjunction with the ‘Innocence’ poem, however, it is a different point of view on the same event, as closely aligned to the other as the answer to a question and yet as different in tone as an outraged stranger is from a shrewd and slightly cynical observer. Picking up the subtle hint at the end of the initial poem that there was something awry in the idea of making marginalised and destitute children parade to the church, sing to the lord and humble themselves before their benefactors, the speaker of this poem inverts the idea they should be grateful for the charity they have received and instead demands to know how any such spectacle could be referred to as “*holy*”. He condemns those who mete out the donations as “*cold and usurous*” and wonders aloud how there could be such a gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in the “*rich and fruitful land*” that is Britain. Attitudes to charity in England at the time were various, but the general trend was in favour of ‘voluntary’ rather than ‘legal’ charity; Malthus further states that “*suspicion of organised charity was supported by belief in the poor’s natural indolence and prognostications of scarcity*” and notes that charitable giving was chiefly celebrated for its “*exalting effect on the mind of the donor*”, regardless of any effect, positive or otherwise, on the recipients – it is perhaps these attitudes and the disgust Blake felt at them that lie at the heart of the twinned ‘Holy Thursday’ poems.

The Chimney Sweeper

Neither of ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ poems offers a pleasant tale, but there is at least a small grain of comfort in that the child Tom Dacre of the ‘Innocence’ poem does indeed retain some manner of innocence and can go about his work with a smile. The speaker in this poem, also a child and also a sweeper, is sadly more conscious of the damage



visited on him than his hapless religious parents are. He is pitiable, dehumanised by his experiences to become “*a little black thing*” in “*clothes of death*”. Like Tom Dacre who went to work “*happy and warm*” despite the cold morning, this boy once “*smil’d among the winter’s snow*”, but now he is cold, lonely and painfully aware that his childhood is over and that the world has, in fact, done him “*injury*”. He speaks of his childhood happiness in the tone of an older person, making it seem long ago, which emphasises the toll his experience is taking on him and how he will age before his time. The hypocrisy of the parents who sell their child into the workforce and then go to pray as though they were pious Christians aligns them with both the exploitative master-sweep and the church itself – all three are culpable, benefiting from the misery of this child and many others besides to make a comparative “*heaven*” on earth for themselves.

The Little Vagabond

Like many of its fellows, this poem is structured around juxtapositions, but the value judgements attached to them do not align as we might have expected. The titular child has wandered from the church to the ale-house, finding the latter more comforting – we perhaps understand this, given that the church is “*cold*” and the ale-house is not, but we also expect that no good will come of preferring drink to religion, or of a child choosing to spend time among the city’s drunks and harlots instead of in the company of upright, moral, church-going citizens. Despite his lack of education, though, the boy is perceptive, and as the poem unfolds we realise he has seen much more genuine merit in the society of the public house than in God’s house – the camaraderie, warmth, conversation and food and drink there contrast with the church, a place of fasting, hypocrisy, authoritarian restrictions, and a cold that is both environmental and emotional. Unlike the little chimney sweeper Tom, this boy knows where he is treated well and where he isn’t – and he is not treated well in the church, which he knows to be no model of heaven, suggesting he has been consistently treated harshly there. He posits an ideal future in which church and ale-house join forces to nourish their congregation in body as well as spirit, and where Christian fellowship takes on a jovial and celebratory aspect rather than the self-righteous parsimony the boy sees in practice. Blake would doubtless have been aware that some eighteenth-century dissenting religious groups met in pubs and obviously saw some merit in this. Having addressed his mother in the opening line, the vagabond imagines God in the ale-house-church as a benevolent father to all present, pleased by the sight of them enjoying the fruits of his creation as they worship, and delighted that in achieving a balance between the needs of the body and of the soul, his children have become “*as pleasant and happy as he*”.

The Garden of Love

In this fairly straightforward expression of Blake’s views on the Church as an institution, the speaker finds that the “*Garden of Love*”, a natural place that bore flowers and welcomed children at play, has been displaced by a foreboding and forbidding newly built chapel. The negatives inherent in its shut gates and its blanket decree that “*Thou shalt not*”, not to mention its uninvited assimilation of the space that used to be a playground for the children, would be enough to convince us that its effect is stifling and oppressive but Blake adds an extra sinister implication in the last stanza, noting the ground that bore flowers emblematic of life and joy now is “*filled with graves*”. The speaker’s diction is simple, the stresses of its tetrameter falling in short neat lines like a nursery rhyme – it evokes a simple person with straightforward and honest desires, as well as one mildly shocked by the suddenness of this hostile arrival. The final rhyming couplet, with an extra metrical foot and internal rhyme per line, lend the poem’s denouement equal senses of prolonged loss, finality and helplessness in the face of inevitable oppression.



The School Boy

As a child Blake so abhorred rules and restraints that his father didn't want to send him to school and he was largely educated at home until his engraving apprenticeship at the age of ten. Blake's stance on the restrictive qualities of a formal education, even a 'good' one, were echoed by the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge, both of whom went to prestigious schools but resented the joyless rote learning and denial of imagination there. The poem's speaker is clearly an observant, sensitive and eloquent boy; he loves books but finds the school itself so stifling as to cause him depression and drive all joy away; the metaphor of a caged bird is used by Blake to suggest the child trapped in the classroom, unable to "sing" for joy or to take pleasure in his learning. Essick notes that the poem's complex versification – shifting between lines of three and four accented syllables and between iambic and trochaic feet, with additional unaccented syllables on some lines – may reflect the emotional tensions; it may also be a demonstration of how free expression can be as effective or even more so than that confined to standard patterns. The poem initially appeared in the 'Innocence' section – its accompanying design shows the pleasures of the spring the boy enjoys rather than the confines of a classroom – but the emphasis on the emotional toll taken on the boy's spirit led Blake to shift the poem to 'Experience' in 1795 and keep it there in all copies printed from 1818 until his death.

London

The speaker wanders through the city and faces a dystopia peopled by those for whom innocence is long gone and experience has proved detrimental. These people are disfigured by "*Marks of weakness, marks of woe*". Whether these scars are mental or physical in nature, the idea of a 'mark' insinuates an inexpungable staining or irreparable soiling as well as reminding us of its Biblical connotations – the 'mark' of Cain, guilty of fratricide and banished, or in the Book of Revelations the 'mark of the Beast' indicating the coming of the Antichrist. Blake alters the iambic meter in the first stanza to trochaic, so that the word "*Marks*" is stressed. This and other kinds of emphasis are important in this poem, mirroring the inevitable cycles of poverty, the daily grind of misery, the pounding blows dealt by life. The second stanza's emphatic repetitions of "*every*" temporarily lend the speaker the kind of doom-laden intonation common to preachers delivering damning indictments of sinners from the pulpit, though the speaker seems to resignedly observe rather than condemn. The streets are alive with unsavoury and upsetting details, both visual and aural. He details the plights of child sweepers, soldiers dead abroad or destitute at home, and others whose "*mind-forg'd manacles*" either cripple them in a barrage of 'Thou Shalt Nots' or rob them of the imagination to envision and work towards a better time for themselves and for the world at large. The last verse is kept for the "*youthful Harlot[s]*" of whom he hears "*most*"; the reference to them is not only to the sound of prostitutes' voices cursing, but to the "*Harlot's curse*" – venereal disease. They pass it to their customers, who pass it to their wives, who then give birth to children bearing the main hallmark of a particular strain of gonorrhoeal infection: damaged suppurating eyes that weep not tears but green discharge and lead to blindness or even death, therein condemning the product of the marriage, the child, to a funeral hearse – a heart-breaking narrative deftly expressed in just three lines and forming a devastating emotional conclusion to the poem.



A02 Poetic Methods

You will need to analyse ways in which the poet uses form, structure, language and tone to shape meanings in poems. You will need to communicate clear, well-developed exploration of the writer's methods, in relation to the key terms of the question.

Titles

The titles of the poems throughout *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are straightforward. In some, they are echoed throughout or alluded to in the text (e.g. 'The Lamb', 'The Tyger', 'The Garden of Love', 'The Ecchoing Green') and in others (e.g. 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Little Black Boy', both versions of 'The Chimney Sweep') they contextualise the information given in the poem by identifying some aspects of the speaker.

They also help organise the 'pairings' of poems between the two books – a prime example of this is 'Holy Thursday'. The 'Innocence' poem of this name mentions this day in its first line, but the 'Experience' poem does not refer to it at all and might not be explicitly linked to the material of its namesake were it not for the fact Blake bestowed the same title on both, inviting direct comparison. Consider also the effect the title has in a poem like 'London' – the poem itself describes scenes of "weakness" and "woe" and alludes to crying and blood, yet the title is more matter-of-fact than a negative and emotional one like 'Infant Sorrow'.

On the whole, the poem titles don't generate much capital for criticism when viewed alone, but can give clues or provide evidence for interpretations based on more substantial aspects of the poems, so bear this in mind in your writing.

Notes on presentation

Author and illustrator Marcus Sedgwick suggests that Blake was the first graphic novelist because of the way in which he "married pictures and words together in a single process on one printing plate". Most Blake scholarship does stress that to the poet, the images that accompanied the poems were important, even intrinsic, to their meaning, and that his artworks, whether paintings or engravings, were as important as his writing within the canon of the mythology he created. Your own studies will obviously maintain focus on his words, but do try to take the time to view reproductions of the original plates of each poem on the specified list to glean a little more of the poet's intentions. It is worth your while to inspect the images yourself and use your observations in supporting any arguments you put forward in the examination (they may qualify as contextual detail to satisfy the third assessment objective – see A03 Contexts section for more details) – if it is based on evidence, your interpretation holds as much validity as any other, and marks can be awarded for your own ideas and arguments.



Settings

As with all the main aspects of the two collections, we can see a contrast in setting between the urban and the rural, but the contrast is not a straightforward dichotomy. Not every poem of 'Innocence' has an idyllic rural setting, and not every poem from 'Experience' has a city setting. Nevertheless, the pastoral has strong connotations of purity and freedom throughout the poems - the "*green plain*" and river to which the freed boys run in 'The Chimney Sweeper' and the heath upon which he was happy in the poem's twin - which correlate strongly with Blake's deep suspicion of the Industrial revolution and its urban grind.

Buildings like the chapel in 'The Garden of Love' or the schoolhouse in 'The School Boy' represent cages, and chimneys, coffins; the man-made structure is usually a negative in the poems selected. Do, however, consider the friendly atmosphere the speaker in 'The Little Vagabond' finds in the ale-house; it is "*healthy & pleasant & warm*" with a welcoming fire and benevolent patrons, and the boy notes that there he is "*used well*" (in this context, a term unlikely to have any sinister implications with regard to his being 'used'). This, then, is the building Blake rates the most worthy - accordingly you might wish to consider the grounds on which he does this, particularly since the boy juxtaposes it with the "*cold*" church, and what positive values he ascribes to the place and its principles.

Structure

The individual poems presented vary in length, meter and rhyme scheme, but the clue to their essential natures is there in the title of the volume - 'Songs'. Poets of the era often wrote long narrative tales to be recited crisply or read aloud from books; Blake's straightforward language, clarity and brevity were partly due to what Northrop Frye calls his "genius for crystallisation" and partly due to a conscious desire to evoke the ballad format, the point at which the oral tradition as practised by bards and poets for thousands of years met the printed word.

In poetry, ballads have a long history (the earliest example of the form in England dates from the 13th century) and as such are difficult to conclusively define. The main prerequisites as applicable in Blake's time would be the communication of some kind of narrative or story, a regular rhythm (ballads were often set to music or sung rather than recited), a regular rhyme scheme (often rhyming alternate lines) and some repetition of verses/choruses or lines (to make them memorable and easily performed or adapted by both professional bards and illiterate amateurs).

In discussing the poems, try to remember the musical quality they have and their debt to popular songs and hymns common to the era, as well as discussing technical aspects of meter and arrangement and the effect these aspects have on the reader.

Voices

The identity of the speakers in these poems is significant, and it is worthwhile to consider how the voice of each poem addresses and positions the reader. Lindsay highlights how poems such as 'The Little Black Boy' are "dramatic lyrics for clearly identified speakers" and notes that with the likes of 'The Chimney Sweeper' "it can be a complex



adventure merely to participate in the speaker's changing awareness from the first line through to the last". Unsurprisingly in a text so preoccupied with human nature and the championing of the 'unheard' voice, many of the speakers seem to be children – at times this is made more evident by the accompanying image. The use of first person isn't carried through every poem, but its advantages in both the 'Innocence' and 'Experience' portions of the text are clear; Blake can use it to heighten both states by either underscoring an 'innocent' voice with irony, often to poignant effect, or by offering a first-hand account of 'experience' that is all the more immediate for the speaker's eyewitness account.

Language

What follows here is not an exhaustive list of quotations or even a comprehensive coverage of the types of language or imagery used; it is simply a starting point from which to extend and enhance your own study. Blake's language is deceptively simple and requires more than a cursory examination. Spend time closely annotating your copies of the poems and investigating editors' notes and critics' interpretations of the choices of words Blake employed – it will pay dividends in the examination, where valid close analysis is richly rewarded.

Some key elements of the imagery employed throughout 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience' are:

Youth – the many child and infant characters can all be located at different points on a sort of spectrum ranging from innocence to experience – at one end is the infant joy, whose two days on earth have been filled with such tenderness and love that the baby has no conception of any possible emotional state apart from "Sweet joy" ('Infant Joy'); at the other end, the spectacle of the "youthful Harlot[s]" (London) hardened by their situation, cursing and impervious to the tears of a new-born baby such as the one from 'Infant Joy'. They are corrupted physically by "plagues" (most likely venereal diseases) and mentally by their history of being abused and neglected; they are still young but nothing remains of their purity or innocence.

Music and Sound – cries, sighs and curses abound in 'London', contributing to a bleak and woeful soundscape; the little chimney sweeper's childish inability to properly pronounce the "Sweep! Sweep!" call with which sweeps 'touted' for business produces the heart-breaking effort "weep! 'weep!" in a painfully obvious allusion to his tragic circumstances; the speaker in 'Infant Sorrow' is greeted by groans and crying and yells aloud himself "Like a fiend". Yet on the other side of this we see idyllic scenes accompanied by happy birdsong, laughing children and the chime of the bell on 'The Ecchoing Green'. The invocation of music is particularly meaningful given the title of the poetry collection – take note of singing that occurs in many of the poems, from the enforced hymns in 'Holy Thursday' to the tender lullaby of 'Infant Joy'. The soundscapes of Blake's poems make them all the more evocative. It is worth paying attention to any language appealing to the five senses, but to sounds in particular.

Religion – given Blake's preoccupation with religion in its opposed spiritual/personal and worldly/institutionalised guises, this theme appears throughout the texts both explicitly and in symbolic forms. Its use is so prevalent that one might be hard pressed to tease out every meaningful occurrence of it in the texts, but it is certainly a major theme of the poems and one where it is worth considering Blake's use of language.



The recurring motif of a lamb ('The Lamb'; Tom Dacre's hair in 'The Chimney Sweeper' which "*curl'd like a lamb's back*"; "*like lambs rejoice*" in 'The Little Black Boy'; "*multitudes of lambs*" in 'Holy Thursday') evokes innocence but also the 'lamb of god', a loaded image in Christian mythology since lambs are also prone to being helpless, lost or sacrificed. References to angels, heaven, churches, priests and God reverberate across the poems, and looking for similarities and contrasts between these references yields the most hopeful results. The church, for example, is "*cold*" and unwelcoming in 'The Little Vagabond', "*black'ning*" in 'London' and an imposing, ominous presence impinging on nature and on the simple joys of life in 'The Garden of Love', all of which clearly signposts Blake's negative feelings about organised religion. Do not neglect slightly less obvious references which may have religious connotations, particularly with regard to Bible stories and imagery – the "*binding with briars*" in 'The Garden of Love' might evoke a parallel with Christ's crown of thorns, for example.

Both of 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems seem to accentuate a great suspicion of religion – in one, the child's parents have "*gone up to the church to pray*", abandoning care of their son in the ignorant belief that pursuing religious orthodoxies is more important than protecting the boy and his innocent happiness; in the other "*an Angel*" appears in the boy's dream and "*set them all free*", yet fails to do so in reality and seems to placate Tom with the meaningless platitude that he will be protected and "*never want joy*" if he will be "*good*". Consider what the angel may represent – might it be a child's symbolic vision of any benign authority figure or intended to specifically represent religion? Has it helped the children in any meaningful way, literally or figuratively? Is it merely a product of Tom's imagination, or should more be expected of it as an agent for the "*good*" it bids Tom to practise?

Many of the poems are similar in vocabulary and symbolism (as well as tone and structure) to hymns and Bible verses – this might be Blake's attempt to write in a style that people would recognise (church services and Bible readings would still have formed the basis of many people's cultural touchstones for music, literature and art), or an attempt to supersede the Bible with his own philosophy, palatably presented, or an ironic treatment verging on parody. Consider the use of religious imagery carefully – it was of deep importance to Blake – and try to recognise and discuss any of the more subtle insinuations that go beyond the poet's obvious mistrust of organised religion in its most common forms.

Traps and Constrictions – from the powerful metaphor of the chimneys in which the little sweepers are forced to work as being "*coffins of black*" into which they are "*lock'd*", to the black-gowned Priests of 'The Garden of Love' "*binding with briars my joys & desires*", Blake is deeply concerned with the idea of enslavement and the constrictions placed on ordinary people, particularly the vulnerable and disenfranchised. His hellish visions in 'London' convey a sense of people being trapped in their situations: the sighing soldier, the crying sweepers, the toughened young prostitutes infected with disease. Of particular interest is the phrase "*mind-gorg'd manacles*", which would suggest that people are, at least in part, prisoners of their own imaginations. This is perhaps an oblique reference to Milton's assertion from Book I of *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven"; it could equally be a condemnation of the Enlightenment's emphasis on the rational and scientific mind at the expense of attention paid to spiritual concerns, or even humanitarian ones like the tackling of social injustice.

Suffering – there are numerous examples of suffering shown, from the traumatic welcome in 'Infant Sorrow' to the assertions made in 'The School Boy' about how education "*drives all joy away*" and grinds "*sorrow and care's dismay*" into him, causing anxiety



and depression. The nature of a character's suffering varies from situation to situation, so pay particular attention to the use of emotive language and evocative adjectives and verbs, even in instances in which the poem seems to describe an otherwise benevolent scene (e.g. the narrator of 'The Little Black Boy' describes himself as "*bereav'd of light*", which suggests he has already begun to internalise the idea that his race and colour is problematic and that being black means he 'lacks' or is bereft of whiteness, making him less worthy than the white boy). These various travails and torments may manifest as corruptors of innocence (e.g. of the child chimney sweeps), a price for experience (e.g. the beginning of life in 'Infant Sorrow'), or even as a foil or contrast for more positive encounters (e.g. the effective juxtaposition of the church where the speaker suffers and the pub where he feels welcome in 'The Little Vagabond'). The poet treats each of these contexts in a slightly different tone which at times seems to delineate a kind of hierarchy of suffering; the suffering of the innocent caused by greed and exploitation receives his bitterest condemnation, while his attitude to the traumatic experience of being born in 'Infant Sorrow', for example, contains a little more stoicism. Blake suggests that some kinds of suffering are a fact of life for every living thing; one can do nothing about them but "*sulk*" (Infant Sorrow) as the newborn baby does. Perhaps he believes we are compelled to accept suffering as a part of nature; perhaps he means us to conserve our energies for fighting the suffering inflicted disproportionately and cruelly on the weak and vulnerable. Critic Northrop Frye said of the volume: "Contempt and Horror have never been more clearly spoken in English poetry". Blake's intention to foster empathy in the reader means he often describes suffering in vivid but not graphic terms, and his appeals to the imagination in this way are extremely effective in conjuring how his characters agonise and endure.

Parents and Children – almost any relationship between children and parents could be seen as a microcosm of the interplay between the two states Blake purports to explore – its very nature is of innocence and experience in constant conflict with one another, as parents seek to both enlighten/teach children and yet also protect and preserve their unspoiled naivety. There can be little doubt that we witness an array of poor parenting in these poems – almost every parent-figure falls short of doing right by the children, and though it rarely if ever seems intentional, it still causes harm. Aside from the damaging action of the parents in 'The Chimney Sweeper' or the seemingly absent mother in 'The Little Vagabond', the speaker in 'The School Boy' demonstrates both eloquence and a love of reading as he inquires of his presumably well-meaning parents why he must be shut away in a school that drains the joy from learning and cuts him off from nature. He calls on them in the fifth stanza, naming them as father and mother and seems to suggest they are guilty of "*care's dismay*", failing to provide for his needs by forcing him to attend a school that does nothing to nurture him as a person.

In contrast the mother in 'The Little Black Boy' is an attentive and loving parent; yet several critics have suspected a deeply ironic tone in the poem, pointing out to greater and lesser degrees that the ideas of theology she passes to the boy are inconsistent and flawed. If we accept that she is teaching him misleading or incorrect material, does this point to deliberate deception on her part (which could in turn be ill-intentioned, or simply a well-meaning lie meant as comfort for the boy), or to the fact that she unquestioningly accepts these inadequate teachings herself and passes them on to him without thinking twice about it?

Allusions to God as a father occur and may provide useful parallels for other parents/ authority figures mentioned – consider whether you feel the attributes of Blake's God where mentioned seem positive in a parent.



Corruption – Blake has a great deal to say about the corruption of innocence and goodness that he saw in society, particularly in relation to children. Nowhere is this idea more clearly expressed than in ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, where Tom Dacre’s hair, which “*curl’d like a lamb’s back*”, is sacrificed like a lamb; the speaker consoles Tom by saying that at least his light hair has been spared blackening by the soot of the chimneys, and this literal “*blackening*” process graphically illustrates the corruption of the innocence of the chimney sweepers. The companion poem of the same name in ‘Songs of Experience’ notes how the happy little boy is taken and put in “*clothes of death*”, again picturing corruption vividly as the blackening of what was light and vivacious. Be aware of any language that could signify the disruption or spoiling of a state of purity.

These are not exhaustive comments – there are additional references to aspects of poverty and splendour, companionship, duty, order and chaos, and the obvious and extensive use of images of nature, particularly birds, flowering plants and rural scenery such as rivers and meadows. Many resources are available which offer interpretations of Blake’s poems and deeper analyses of the possible connotations of his various choices of vocabulary; use them to inform and develop your own readings.



A03 Contexts

Blake's Life and Work

Born in Soho in 1757, Blake was the second son of a lower-middle-class family; his father was a hosier. He was a wilful and imaginative child who frequently saw visions of God and other celestial beings. He hated to go to school but he learned to read and write and would single-mindedly devour books without much concern for the outside world. He was particularly fond of the Bible, and would take a great deal of inspiration from it in subsequent years, though he condemned organised religion. This may have sprung first from his family, who belonged to a Dissenter sect and were inclined to distrust and disregard both Church and, to some extent, State authority in favour of a less institution-based Christian belief system.

Blake studied at an art school for a few years from the age of ten and was then apprenticed to an engraver when he was fourteen. His later reputation as a poet and writer, even as a painter, has often overshadowed the fact that Blake was a painstaking and innovative craftsman of printing and engraving; in his lifetime it was for this that he was best known (though not widely renowned or recognised).

He married Catherine Boucher in 1782 and they remained devoted to each other until his death in 1827. Blake's main business venture, a printing shop, failed, as did his published works and exhibitions at the time. He was forced to work variously as an art teacher, illustrator and engraver of other people's works to support them both. The Blakes often found themselves in financial difficulties, but Catherine was his constant companion and helped him arrange and engrave *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* among other works. Another important figure in his life was his brother Robert, with whom he was very close. Robert died aged just twenty in 1787, but Blake continued to see him in some of the many visions he saw throughout his life and even credited him with proffering the idea that Blake would employ to create a new kind of engraving process.

Blake was a champion of social justice and a believer in questioning authority and rebelling against institutions that undermined or limited human rights. He was disappointed, often angry, at the repeated poor reception of his works throughout his life and fell out with several influential colleagues during his career. His disillusionment grew, and in later years his writing took on more complexity and opacity owing to an increasingly involved mythology that he created himself. He was denounced as mad by many and died in 1827 largely unrecognised, but in subsequent years scholars and other artists (beginning with Alexander Gilchrist, who wrote Blake's biography) began to look to his work with renewed interest. He was of particular interest to Modernists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (some argue he was the 'first Modernist'), and he has since taken his place in the canon of great and influential English writing.



Socio-Historical Context

Religion

Blake came from a family of Dissenters and had been taught from an early age to question authority but also to believe in God and follow the teachings of the Bible. His relationship to religion was an important one but problematic; he was never an Atheist, and the fact that he saw visions of God and angels at various points in his life was extremely significant, but he had a hatred of organised religion in all its forms and was deeply suspicious and critical of the Church and its administration. Given the evils he saw in the world, Blake was sometimes angry with God as its creator for permitting such things to exist. He despised the hypocrisy of those who used religion as a form of control over the populace while doing little in the way of Christian charity to help the less fortunate.

Prior to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* Blake published an illustrated book of religious aphorisms in which he condemned most of the norms of orthodox religion; in subsequent years he was to re-appropriate and reinterpret many figures and events from the Bible into his own deeply involved mythology, combining them with aspects of other religions and folklore to create writings of great complexity that even now aren't fully understood. In the Age of Reason, matters of religion were increasingly up for discussion, and many writers, philosophers and movements attempted to reconcile various aspects of it with new discoveries in science and new societal trends. It was to Blake's eternal sorrow that the impulse to believe in a deity did not in wider society seem to translate into the realisation of a better world of the sort he was to conjure in works like 'Jerusalem'.

The Age of Reason

The first three quarters of the eighteenth century is often called the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, in reference to the cultural preoccupation with reason, logic, science and intellect – emphasis on the brain, observation and external truths as opposed to the heart, intuition and internal truth based on feelings. The issue was central to cultural theory of the time and most writers of the age had a stance on it. Blake's was made clear in his 1795 painting depicting Sir Isaac Newton hunched naked over a diagram with a compass in his hand, fully absorbed in a calculation and accordingly blind to the world around him. The idea of everything being measured and "charter'd" (recall how Blake uses this word in 'London') was to Blake a denial of the world of nature, the power of imagination and of the true qualities of humanity as spiritual beings.

In an extract from an untitled poem in his commonplace notebook, dating from some point between 1800 and 1803, Blake wrote:

*The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of light
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.*

Contrasting scientific theories with allusions to the struggle of the Hebrew tribes in the Bible shows how generally insignificant Blake considered scientific theories and rationalism in the grand scheme of the world.

The Industrial Revolution

There had been great developments in science and mechanisation throughout the eighteenth century, and in Blake's lifetime, such activity gathered pace. The world's first iron bridge was completed in 1779 in Shropshire; roads and canals were being built at a great pace and these enabled improved supply lines for providing raw materials to



mills and factories. More influential than these, or the various advances in spinning or processing machinery, was the steam engine, workable versions of which were brought to market during the mid-1700s.

Production of goods was increased rapidly, but conditions for the workers were largely abysmal. Increasing numbers of people came to live in cities, either lured by the prospects of work in factories or driven from their lands by agricultural reforms that decimated entire rural communities; they were crammed into slum housing in appalling conditions, and factory owners increased profits by demanding long working hours and paying extremely small wages. The amount of coal burnt to power the steam engines created dark smog over the cities; machinery was often dangerous, and some factories favoured women and children for their workforce as they felt justified in paying them even less than the men. In her 1790 treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote of London: “In this great city that proudly rears its head and boasts of its population and commerce, how much misery lurks in pestilent corners.” The conditions Blake describes in poems such as ‘London’ are not mere products of his imagination, but real examples of how some of the populace were forced to live.

The French Revolution

It was a Revolutionary Age – the American Revolution had broken out in 1775 when, resisting Britain’s attempts to increase revenue from the New World by imposing higher taxes, American colonists had rebelled against British soldiers. The Declaration of Independence was signed on 4th July 1776, and after five years of fighting and two of reconciliation Britain recognised America as an independent country. However, the most iconic revolution of the times was that which took place in France, and its most turbulent years largely coincide with the period in which Blake was composing the poems that would become *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in 1794.

It’s not insignificant that during the intervening years between *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* being first published as separate volumes, Blake had become deeply disillusioned with the progress of the French Revolution. His views on it, as with many such issues, were complicated – on principle he admired rebellion against authority but abhorred violence – but he was not alone in feeling that the aims and intentions of the revolution (which had begun as dissatisfaction with injustice and impoverished living conditions under a rich and powerful monarchy, crystallized as a reaction to unfair taxes on the poor, and was at least initially a democratic attempt to gain representation in parliament and increased rights for ordinary people) were being subverted horribly.

The failure of the Legislative Assembly, France’s wars with Prussia, Austria and other countries, the massacres of suspected traitors by revolutionaries and the executions of King Louis XVI and later Queen Marie Antoinette were all just a partial testament to the disorder and violence reverberating throughout the country; by mid-1793 Jacobin revolutionaries led by Robespierre were wreaking havoc in the Reign of Terror. The cost of liberty, it seemed, was extremely high; the themes of the corruption of goodness and the struggles of the poor, both so prevalent in *Experience*, were writ large on a chapter of contemporary history.

Writers and Philosophers

The Age of Enlightenment gave rise to so many significant works of influential philosophy and ideology that it would be impossible to list them here, but there are a few of primary significance. Many critics mention Blake’s earlier predilection for the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme, both of whom wrote treatises on Christianity that were accepted by Dissenters but condemned by mainstream Christians as being heretical. Both



of them had interesting ideas about the areas of religion that most interested Blake – the divine aspects of humanity and the human aspects of God – though he didn't, of course, accept the entirety of either writer's theories, and rejected the work of Swedenborg when he felt that the Swedenborgian church was becoming too regimented and hierarchical, beginning to mimic the established religious order from which it had chosen to break away.

Similar to his rejection of scientific rationalism, Blake disagreed with many of the most influential writers of the era, at least in part and often to surprising extents. The French writer Rousseau, for example, believed children were born good and corrupted by society; he advocated allowing them to develop naturally into adults at their own speed rather than forcing adulthood upon them; he penned the famous line "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains" in 1762. One might not only consider these opinions an analogue for the views of Blake but might even call to mind Blake's similar imagery of "*mind-forg'd manacles*" ('London') when reading Rousseau's ideas on how people were sometimes complicit in their own enslavement. Yet Blake rejected much of Rousseau because of the French writer's wholehearted belief that humans were improved by education (compare this with Blake's attitude in 'The School Boy'). He similarly disliked the French philosopher and writer Voltaire because of his Deism, the idea that God had made the world but was no longer involved in its workings. In an untitled poem after 1800, Blake wrote a brief poem beginning:

*Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau:
Mock on, Mock on: 'tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind,
And the wind blows it back again.*

John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he proposed that all are born with no inherent knowledge and can know only what they observe and learn, was passionately rejected by Blake, who called the writer "an agent of the devil" and condemned as bleak and soulless this supposed view of humanity as an army of scientists poised to measure, sample and analyse the world to try to understand themselves.

It is clear that for Blake, it was vital that philosophy recognised that acts of divine creation were mirrored by man's own imagination and that it was only through creative acts of imagination that a person could come to know him- or herself as a being both human and semi-divine.

Slavery and Abolition

Crystallizing several years of slow but sure traction for the cause throughout the previous decade, The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in England in 1787. William Wilberforce took up the cause the same year, and in May 1789 delivered his longest and most famous parliamentary speech against the slave trade. Blake knew several prominent figures in the anti-slavery movement through artist friends, and had contributed to the growing canon of abolitionist literature through the illustrations he provided for the published work of John Gabriel Stedman, who had witnessed the treatment of slaves in Surinam. Blake's engravings were extremely graphic in depicting the horrors faced by these wretched slaves and there is no doubt that both men intended the book as an explicit attack on the trade which had made England rich in terms of finance, free labour and imported delicacies like cotton and sugar, but at a huge cost to the country's perceived moral decency. An initial bill to abolish slavery in 1791 was defeated, and it wasn't until 1833 that slavery itself (at least in its most recognisable forms) would be outlawed within the British Empire.



Women and Children

Women were legally considered the property of either their fathers or their husbands at this time (and would continue to be classed as such until the twentieth century when they finally won the right to vote, thereby being recognised as citizens in their own right), and their opportunities for freedom were extremely limited even in the higher social classes. In the lower classes, prostitution was extremely common as few women had any other marketable assets or means to make a living, and venereal disease was rife. This is almost certainly what Blake was alluding to in the final line of 'London'). Those women who could obtain jobs as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in factories were still subject to the same harsh, often dangerous conditions and long hours as the men, and received a smaller wage for their efforts.

Worse than this was the prevalence of child labour in mills, mines, factories and of course particularly as chimney sweeps, where their small size was perceived as an advantage. Life was tough for everyone, labour laws didn't exist and so children had little or no protection from exploitative masters who would take on apprentices as young as four, use and discard them as they outlived their usefulness. Factory and mill machinery was dangerous, particularly as the children were often utilised to duck and weave between moving parts to clear debris because they were small and nimble. Chimney sweeping was a death sentence for many - falling from inside the chimneystacks often led to death or deformity whilst contracting particular strains of cancer and respiratory diseases from the constant exposure to soot and dirt was also likely. There was no access to healthcare and no recourse or rehabilitation for those who were sick or injured. Blake railed consistently against these horrendous practices, as did some of his contemporaries. It is distressing to note that little changed, and Charles Dickens was still raising the same points in protest a generation later.

Romanticism

The rise of Romanticism in the eighteenth century was more associated with Wordsworth, Keats and Coleridge than with Blake, who has tended to be pushed into the generic box of Romantic poets as a convenient chronological categorisation rather than as an apt description of his work. Nevertheless, some tenets of the Romantic ideal apply to Blake. The main characteristics of Romanticism as practised at the time revolved around a love of nature, rejection of the establishment, a fascination with past and exotic cultures (such as medieval romance or Oriental artwork), an attraction to the supernatural (overlapping with gothic literature and giving rise to, among other things, Mary Shelley's seminal novel *Frankenstein* in 1818), a quest for truth and beauty and the indulgence of sensuality. Blake's condemnation of strict scientific rationalism would have naturally aligned him more with the Romantics, and some of the poets and artists of the movement were among the earliest figures of note to recognise and praise Blake's talents, with Wordsworth memorably stating that there was "...no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in his madness which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott".

The Illuminated Manuscripts

Note that specific information related to the illustrations/engravings with which Blake surrounded his poems is also perfectly acceptable as contextual information – as ever, the key is to use the information effectively and appropriately, ensuring it is strictly relevant to the question you are responding to.



A04 Connections

Students should be keenly aware that there are equal marks available for their treatment of the given poem and the second poem selected in the exam.

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within and between Blake's poems, discussing similarities and differences in the handling of themes and poetic techniques, and in contexts. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded.

To meet the requirements of this Assessment Objective, you must:

- **Explore the connections** between the poem printed in the Resource Booklet and the poem you choose, and the external/contextual information you have studied. Always bear in mind that the Driving Objective for this unit is **A02** (Poetic Methods).
- **Note both similarities and differences** – this could be between voices, themes, aspects of imagery or any other techniques you find.
- **Make sure the connections noted are significant and relevant.**

The links you make will mostly depend upon the question asked, but what follows are examples of connections you can begin to explore (N.B. the connections are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive). Since the question you tackle will stipulate one text about which you must write, the connections below are arranged by poem to enable you to begin tracing ways in which you can select and examine an appropriate match for the poem given. They are a starting point only, detailing some aspects of theme, language and voice that could be used to connect certain poems, but you should add your own connections as you learn about each poem in class.

In some cases you may want to connect the question's given poem with its 'equivalent' or 'companion' piece from the 'opposite' book (e.g., pairing 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence* with its namesake from *Songs of Experience*, or choosing 'The Tyger' as a counterpart to 'The Lamb'). This will usually be fine; just beware of automatically assuming that this pairing will provide the best material in every situation. Consider the question carefully and apply your own judgement before settling on your choice of comparison.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Infant Joy

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section ('Infant Sorrow')
- Idea of the relationship between naming/being/identity – links to 'The Lamb'
- Music/singing as an expression of joy – links to 'The Little Vagabond', 'The School Boy', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Chimney Sweeper'
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Garden of Love', 'The Lamb', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'The School Boy', 'London'



- Dialogue/additional speakers – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Parent/child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’

The Lamb

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in other section (‘The Tyger’)
- Theme of creation/making – links to ‘The Tyger’, ‘Infant Sorrow’
- Religion/God as potentially positive force – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Introduction’
- Idea of the relationship between naming/being/identity – links to ‘Infant Joy’
- Lamb motif - links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (Innocence)
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The School Boy’, ‘London’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- God as father/creator – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘Introduction’

Holy Thursday

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section
- Motif of a lamb - links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Lamb’
- Music/singing as an expression of joy – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- Religion as ineffective/patronising – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (Experience), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (Experience), ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’

The Chimney Sweeper

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section
- Music/singing as an expression of joy – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’
- Religion as proscriptive/stifling/hypocritical – links to ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Religion as corrupt/misleading – links to ‘London’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Garden of Love’
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘London’
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘The School Boy’, ‘London’



- Dialogue/additional speakers – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Introduction’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Poverty and deprivation – links to ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘London’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘London’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (Experience), ‘London’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’

The Little Black Boy

- Motif of a lamb - links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Lamb’
- Religion as ineffective/patronising – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Holy Thursday’
- Religion/God as potentially positive force – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- First person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The School Boy’, ‘London’
- Dialogue/additional speakers – links to ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Introduction’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- God as father/creator – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘Introduction’

The Ecchoing Green

- Music/singing as an expression of joy – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The School Boy’, ‘London’
- Dialogue/additional speakers – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Introduction’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’

SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Introduction

- Religion/God as potentially positive force – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Black Boy’
- Religion/God as (possibly) corrupt/misleading – links to ‘London’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Garden of Love’



- God as father/creator – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Tyger’
- Links to the idea of creation/making – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Tyger’
- Knowledge/experience, esp. forbidden/flawed/dangerous knowledge – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘London’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’
- Innocence corrupted (references to the ‘Fall’ of mankind and its subsequent suffering) – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘London’

Infant Sorrow

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section (‘Infant Joy’)
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘London’
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The School Boy’, ‘London’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’
- Theme of creation/making – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘Introduction’

The Tyger

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section (‘The Lamb’)
- Theme of creation/making – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘Introduction’
- Formidable creation or structure – link to ‘The Garden of Love’
- Knowledge/experience, esp. forbidden/flawed/dangerous knowledge – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘London’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’
- Man-made/industrial/non-natural creations or structures – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- God as father/creator – link to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Introduction’

Holy Thursday

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘London’
- Poverty and deprivation – links to ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’

The Chimney Sweeper

- Linked by title to an oppositional/contrasting poem in the other section
- Motif of a lamb - links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Lamb’
- Religion as ineffective/ironic/patronising – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘Holy Thursday’
- Religion/God as potentially positive force – links to ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘Introduction’
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The



Little Vagabond', 'Holy Thursday', 'Infant Sorrow', 'London', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (other)

- First-person narrative/speaker – links to 'Infant Joy', 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Garden of Love', 'The Lamb', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'The School Boy', 'London'
- Dialogue/additional speakers – links to 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'Infant Joy', 'Introduction'
- Child/young character – links to 'Infant Joy', 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The School Boy', 'The Lamb', 'Holy Thursday' (both), 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Little Vagabond', 'London'
- Parent/Child relationship – links to 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'London', 'Infant Sorrow', 'Infant Joy', 'The School Boy', 'The Little Vagabond'
- Poverty and deprivation – links to 'Holy Thursday', 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'London'
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'London', 'The Garden of Love', 'Holy Thursday', 'The School Boy', 'The Little Vagabond'
- God as father/creator – link to 'The Lamb', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Tyger', 'Introduction'

The Little Vagabond

- Music/singing as an expression of joy – links to 'Infant Joy', 'The School Boy', 'Holy Thursday', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Chimney Sweeper'
- Religion shown to be proscriptive/stifling/hypocritical – links to 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'The Garden of Love'
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to 'The School Boy', 'The Garden of Love', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'Holy Thursday', 'Infant Sorrow', 'London'
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to 'Infant Joy', 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Garden of Love', 'The Lamb', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'The School Boy', 'London'
- Child/young character – links to 'Infant Joy', 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The School Boy', 'The Lamb', 'Holy Thursday' (both), 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'The Little Black Boy', 'London'
- Parent/Child relationship – links to 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'London', 'Infant Sorrow', 'Infant Joy', 'The School Boy'
- Poverty and deprivation – links to 'Holy Thursday', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'London'
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'London', 'The Garden of Love', 'Holy Thursday', 'The School Boy', 'The Little Vagabond'
- Man-made/industrial/non-natural creations or structures – links to 'The Tyger', 'The Garden of Love', 'London'
- God as father/creator – links to 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'The Lamb', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Tyger', 'Introduction'

The Garden of Love

- Religion as proscriptive/stifling/hypocritical – links to 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'Holy Thursday', 'The Little Vagabond'
- Religion as corrupt/misleading – links to 'London', 'The Chimney Sweeper'
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to 'The School Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'The Little Vagabond', 'Holy Thursday', 'Infant Sorrow', 'London'
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to 'Infant Joy', 'Infant Sorrow', 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Lamb', 'The Ecchoing Green', 'The Little Black Boy', 'The Chimney Sweeper' (both), 'The School Boy', 'London'



- Formidable creation or structure – link to ‘The Tyger’
- Knowledge/experience, esp. forbidden/flawed/dangerous knowledge – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘London’, ‘The School Boy’
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Man-made/industrial/non-natural creations or structures – links to ‘The Tyger’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’

The School Boy

- Music/singing as an expression of joy (birds) – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘London’
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘London’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Knowledge/experience, esp. forbidden/flawed/dangerous knowledge – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘London’
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’

London

- Religion as corrupt/misleading – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, ‘The Garden of Love’
- Innocence corrupted/persecuted – links to ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘London’
- First-person narrative/speaker – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The School Boy’
- Child/young character – links to ‘Infant Joy’, ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘The Ecchoing Green’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Lamb’, ‘Holy Thursday’ (both), ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Parent/Child relationship – links to ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘Infant Sorrow’, ‘Infant Joy’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Poverty and deprivation – links to ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The Little Vagabond’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both)
- Knowledge/experience, esp. forbidden/flawed/dangerous knowledge – links to ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Black Boy’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘The School Boy’
- Suspicion of Church/State/other Authority – links to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (both), ‘London’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘Holy Thursday’, ‘The School Boy’, ‘The Little Vagabond’
- Man-made/industrial/non-natural creations or structures – links to ‘The Tyger’, ‘The Garden of Love’, ‘The Little Vagabond’



Specimen question:

By referring closely to *London* (Poem **3(a)**) in the accompanying Resource Booklet and one other appropriately selected poem, and making use of relevant external biographical information, examine the poetic methods which Blake uses to write about criticisms of society.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of each poem.

The poetic methods selected will of course partly depend on your choice of accompanying poem, and the effects they conjure for the reader and the picture of society that emerges will be up to you to argue based on your own analysis of the two poems. However, there are facets that must be included whatever your stance, and they have to be related to the key terms of the question.

AO4 needs connections between poems and additional external contextual information. The criticisms of society in 'London' could centre on the "*mind-forg'd manacles*" or abusive authority figures and institutions like the church or the palace mentioned, or even the institution of marriage itself; they could equally centre around the grimness of the city as a product of the Industrial Revolution. The references to "*Infant*", "*Chimney-sweeper*" (who were nearly all small boys) and even the "*youthful Harlot*" are sufficient for you to focus primarily on Blake's feelings about the treatment of the young and innocent by society. Picking one such focal point will better equip you to choose an appropriate poem for comparison (though you can examine other societal criticisms in the same essay should you want to) and to focus on the use of poetic methods. For a comparison poem condemning man-made institutions, for example, you could choose the oppressive representation of the church in 'The Garden of Love', or 'The Little Vagabond' with its church-versus-ale-house opposition. The dismal gloom of the cityscape could be contrasted with a bright and attractive portrait of rural life, such as 'The Ecchoing Green', and for the ill-treatment of children, the *Experience* version of 'Holy Thursday' or either version of 'The Chimney Sweeper' could be apt selections – you will doubtless be able to think of others and justify them as viable, based on the stipulated poem and the focal point raised in the question.

In terms of external information, 'London' itself affords plenty of opportunities to discuss Blake's feelings about church and state, his dislike of violence (symbolised in the poem by the "*hapless Soldier*" and the blood) and even his mixed feelings in the wake of the French Revolution.

A03 – in this example, biographical information is the stipulated contextual area. You could discuss the abolitionist movement and Blake's resistance to all forms of slavery, and relate this to the idea of "*manacles*" and the laments of the characters in the poem, all of whom seem trapped in some way. The key is to have an outline in mind of the route you will take in examining the stipulated poem in view of what the question asks – taking a moment to clearly conceive your main argument here will help you make an informed choice for your comparison poem and give you a clear outline for your answer. Remember



that it is biographical information that is stipulated, not simply social-historical.

The question requires analysis of Blake's poetic methods (A02) which will be demonstrated throughout as you analyse the specified poem and the self-selected second poem. Remember 'poetic methods' refers to structure and tone as well as language, but close language analysis is important, especially since you will have access to a copy of the main subject poem in the examination in the Resource Booklet.

Remember:

- Stick to the key terms used in the question
- Think what the question is really asking you to do
- Make connections throughout, demonstrating your knowledge of the poems and the poet, and your ability to link concepts, ideas and references.



Useful Links and Further Reading

Information

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-blake#about>

The Poetry Foundation's page on Blake, with biographical information, critical analysis and discussion and the texts of the poems themselves

<http://www.blakesociety.org/about-blake/blakes-works-2/>

The Blake Society website, with lots of biographical information and links

<http://crossref-it.info/textguide/songs-of-innocence-and-experience/13/timeline>

Crossref-it's Blake hub, with good individual poem analyses and contextual information

Analytical essays

<http://bit.ly/1KyZVy3>

Norton, George. William Blake's Chimney Sweeper poems: a close reading. Article published at British Library site.

<http://bit.ly/1RePQp4>

Byrne, Joseph. Blake's Contraries Game. Published as part of the Praxis series 'Digital Designs on Blake', this posits an interesting theory about Blake in terms of video games, but contains a lot of useful ideas about juxtapositions and oppositions in Blake's imagery.

Essick, Robert N (ed). *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. University of California Press, 2008

Frye, Northrop. *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. University of Toronto Press, 2004

Lindsey, David W. *Critics Debate: Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1989



Appendix 1

Selected Poems named for study:

The Ecchoing Green
The Lamb
The Little Black Boy
The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence)
Holy Thursday (Songs of Innocence)
Infant Joy
Introduction (Songs of Experience)
Holy Thursday (Songs of Experience)
The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Experience)
The Tyger
The Garden of Love
The Little Vagabond
London
Infant Sorrow
The School Boy

**GLOSSARY** - this glossary is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Alliteration	the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of two or more words in close proximity.
Anapaest	a foot (see Foot) with a regular pattern of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one – da-da-DUM – such as in the words ‘disbelief’, ‘incomplete’ or ‘unaware’. The pattern does not have to be confined within one word – “in the woods” or “and she screams” are also examples of an anapaest. See Meter.
Anaphora	a rhetorical feature where the same word or phrase is deliberately repeated at the beginning of a sentence or clause.
Assonance	the repetition of vowel sounds across words to help create a consistent effect. It can be quite subtle, so only comment on it if you feel you can link it to the effect created. As with alliteration, these can be various.
Caesura	a break or pause in the middle of the poetic line, usually indicated by a punctuation mark such as a semi-colon, colon or full stop. The effect is to break the rhythm of the line.
Couplet	two lines of verse that are paired in their rhythm and/or rhyme pattern – often known as a rhyming couplet and used to ‘tidy’ the end of a longer poem with a different rhyme scheme, such as a Shakespearean sonnet.
Enjambment	the running on of the poetic line into the next, or from one stanza into the next without a break. The opposite of end-stopped lines.
Euphemism	a mild word used in place of another word which might be considered unpleasant, harsh or offensive.
Foot	a unit of metre or poetic rhythm, made up of a number of syllables arranged in a pattern. There are different names for the various combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables – examples include the iamb (one unstressed and one stressed syllable – da-DUM – such as ‘divine’ or ‘delight’), the trochee (one stressed and one unstressed syllable – DUM-da – such as ‘music’ or ‘people’), the anapaest (two unstressed and one stressed syllable – da-da-DUM – such as ‘unaware’ or ‘disbelief’) and the spondee (two stressed syllables – DUM-DUM – like ‘heart-break’). These syllabic rhythms can occur across more than one word, so try to pay attention to the line as a whole to get a sense of how many syllables there are and where the stresses fall. See Metre.
Hyperbole	language that uses exaggeration for particular effect.
Imagery	This word generally applies visually, to vivid or figurative language that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals



to the sense of touch. Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects. (See advice on discussing imagery).

- Idiom/Idiomatic** group of words established in everyday speech, but where the meaning is not deducible from the literal meaning of the words used.
- Irony** a contrast or discrepancy between words and their meaning. This can be verbal irony, in which a poet or character says one thing but mean the opposite, or dramatic irony, in which a poetic character's speech takes on extra meaning because he or she is in ignorance of a situation or event known to the audience.
- Juxtaposition** deliberate placing of two contrasting characters, things, ideas close together for a particular purpose.
- Metaphor** where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.
- Meter/Metre** metre is the measurement of rhythm, expressed as the number and kind of metrical feet in a line of poetry. This measurement considers the number of syllables and where the stresses fall in each foot.
- Metonymy** a form of figurative speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. One example would be referring to royalty or a monarch as "the crown".
- Motif** a dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.
- Persona** See speaker.
- Personification** to attribute human characteristics to a non-human subject.
- Pun** a word or phrase that has more than one meaning, often used humorously.
- Rhetoric** the art of using language to persuade; rhetoric takes in a range of devices.
- Simile** where something is directly compared to something else, using "like" or "as".
- Speaker** the person or speaking voice narrating the poem, often but not always associated with the poet
- Spondee** a metrical foot of two stressed syllables – it is uncommon and where used it has an emphatic deliberate effect. One good example in Blake is in 'The Lamb', where the last two syllables of the first line – "Little Lamb who made thee" – form a spondee (following two trochees) to emphasise the importance of the act of creation and gives the simple line a little more gravity. See Metre.



Theme	a main idea or concern explored in a work of art.
Tone	the emotion or attitude intended by the writer, conveyed through use of language, rhythm and punctuation. (See advice on tone).
Trochee	a foot (see Foot) or unit of rhythm which consists of one stressed and one unstressed syllable – DUM-da – such as ‘music’ or ‘people’. These syllables can be spread across two words instead of one, e.g.: “Kill them” or “Go then.” See Metre.

