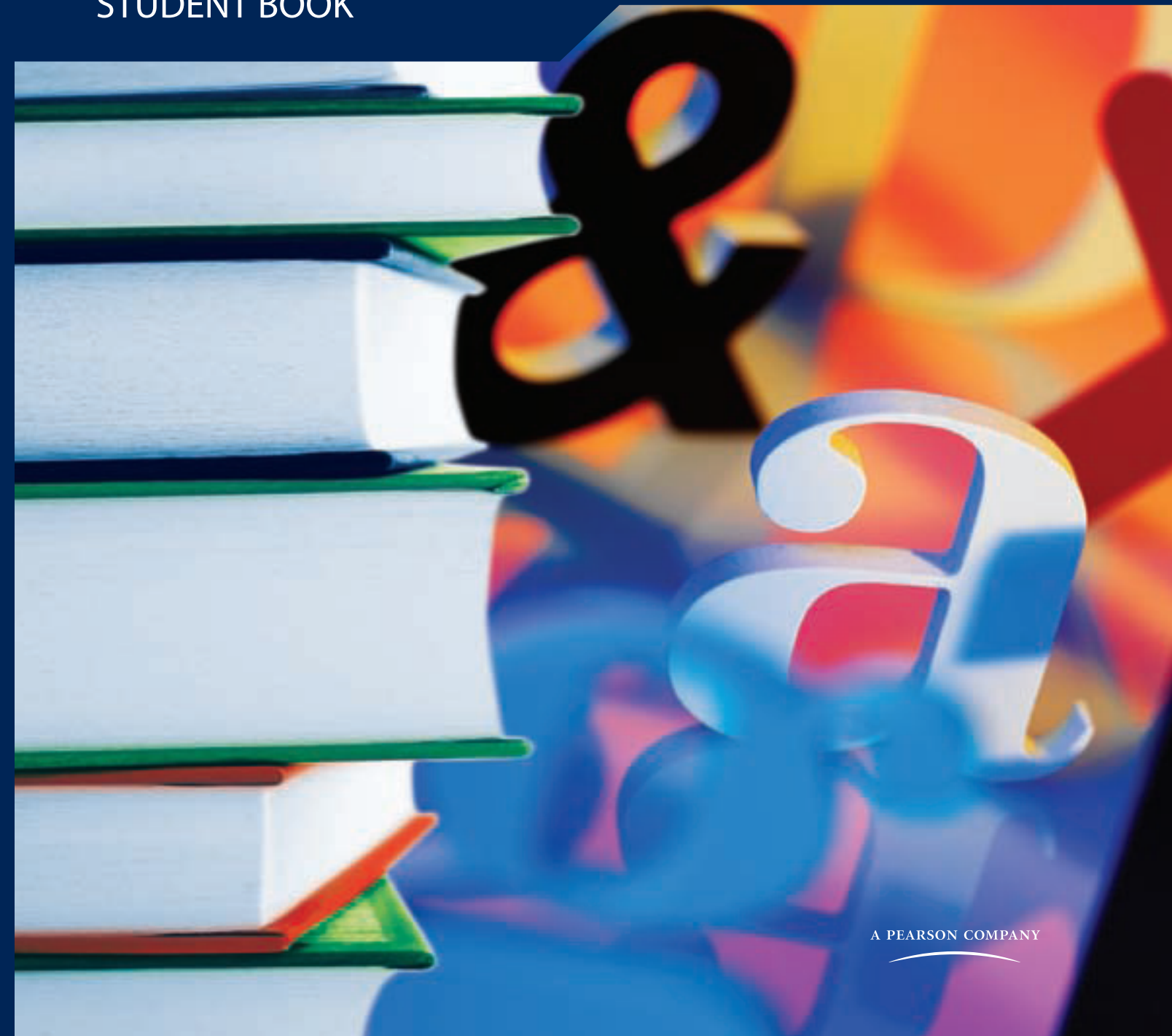


Edexcel English Literature Part 1: Exploring Poetry

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STUDENT BOOK



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Part 1 Exploring poetry

This part of the book helps you develop your skills in reading and analysing poems

Contents

1 What is poetry?	4
2 Type	7
3 Form and structure	8
4 Rhyme	20
5 Rhythm	23
6 Language	27
7 Imagery	30
8 Voice	34
9 Tone and mood	38

1 What is poetry?

The word poetry originates from the Greek word 'poiesis' meaning 'a making' or 'a creating' and from a time when poetry was predominantly an oral form of carefully crafted, patterned language which was recited to listeners and then passed on to others through the medium of speech. Spoken poetry is with us all from birth, in the rhythms of words we babble when we are babies, and the word-play and rhymes we enjoy as children long before we have learned to read. Poetry of course comes in many written forms too and can serve a variety of functions in people's lives, such as to help them make sense of their grief or their joy, or to capture a key moment or experience.

Over the centuries, many people have attempted to define poetry. You have only to look in a dictionary or carry out an internet search to find that every definition has a slightly different take on what poetry is. Many of these definitions do share a sense that poetry contains language which has been crafted in some way. In this section you will discover more about the different aspects of this craft – for example how poets choose and use types and forms of poetry, how they make rhythmic and rhyming patterns with language, how they create images, tones, moods and a variety of voices to express what they wish to say. Poetry provokes many different reactions from its audiences and you will all have your own personal responses to the poems you are studying. This section will help you to develop an in-depth understanding of the different features of the craft and to express your views with confidence.

Activity 1

Think about the following comments. How easy would it be to replace the words 'poetry' or 'poet' with the words 'prose' or 'prose writer'? What do the comments reveal to you about the nature of poetry?

They said he was the last poet of the grass court era.

Look at his movement on the pitch! Sheer poetry!

The way that car purred along the open road was poetry in motion.

She's a poet and she doesn't know it!

The comments reveal something of the special nature of poetry and, at the same time, the way it is rooted within our consciousness and the rhythms of everyday life. It is interesting to see how sports journalists often use the word 'poetry' in their accounts of notable sporting performances. The poet Tom Leonard writes that 'if you dribble past five defenders it isn't called sheer prose'. What do you think he is saying about poetry in making this comment?

Activity 2

- 1 Read the following descriptions of poetry and the comments on the impact that poetry has on its readers. They were written by poets, critics and those involved in English teaching.

What is poetry?

'a verbal contraption'
W.H. Auden

'Like a microscope'
Richard Andrews

'a tough old bird'
David Horner

'The best words in the best order'
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

'a jigsaw puzzle'
Michael Baldwin

'a knit of words'
George Steiner

poetry demands of its readership
'a new effort of attention'
D.H. Lawrence

'Poetry can tell us what human beings are. It can tell us why we stumble and fall and how, miraculously, we can stand up.'
Maya Angelou

'Prose is like TV and poetry is like radio.'
Simon Armitage

'Poetry is ... speech with song in it, the song made by words made to dance.'
Robert Nye

Poems are 'objects crafted in a medium of riddling wordplay, yielding a range of meanings.'
Michael Benton and Geoff Fox

'Poetry is a concise way of participating in others' experience.'
Jay Rogoff

'Poetry cannot be defined, only experienced.'
Christopher Logue

'Poetry springs from a level below meaning; it is a molecular thing, a pattern of sound and image.'
Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill

'What is good poetry if not language awake to its own powers?'
Jane Hirshfield

- 2 Sort the descriptions into different groups (for example, you could group those that focus on the content or the language of poetry). You will find that some will fit into a number of different groups.
- 3 With a partner, discuss how you have grouped them. Explore together what you have found. What aspects of poetry do the descriptions highlight as being significant? Which groups and individual descriptions do you find most interesting? Which reflect your own views on poetry? Do the descriptions reveal any of the pleasures or difficulties with poetry that you have experienced so far?
- 4 Share your ideas with the rest of your group.

Take it further

Discuss whether you think there are any aspects of poetry that are not covered by the descriptions in Activity 2. If you think something is missing, try to write your own description and share it with the rest of your group.

Your previous experiences of poetry

In completing Activity 2 you have begun to explore some of your own views about poetry. In your discussions you may have touched on some of your previous experiences of reading, listening to and/or studying poetry.

We are now going to focus more fully on these previous experiences in order to highlight some of the skills and knowledge you need to develop further during your preparation for the exam.

Activity 3

- 1 With a partner or in a small group, briefly discuss the following:
 - a any poetry you have read or studied before and how you responded to it. Talk about specific poems that impressed you in one way or another, poems you found most challenging and poems you disliked at first, but then changed your view on
 - b the different ways in which your poetry study was assessed (eg as a coursework essay, writing your own poems in the style of another poet and providing a commentary, short answer questions in an exam, as part of a speaking and listening assessment)
 - c the methods of assessment you found the most difficult, the easiest, the most rewarding, and why.
- 2 Individually, read the statements in the chart and on a copy, tick the one box on each row which you think applies to your level of experience at this stage.

Poetry experiences				
Statement	A lot	Some	A little	None
a I can identify different types of poems (eg sonnet, ballad, lyric, free verse).				
b I have experience of talking and writing about rhyme and rhythm in poetry.				
c I have experience of talking and writing about forms and structures of poems and why they have been chosen.				
d I have experience of talking and writing about voice in poetry.				
e I have experience of talking and writing about a poet's use of imagery .				
f I have experience of talking about tone and mood in poetry.				
g I have experience of talking and writing about language choices made by poets and the impact that these have on audiences.				
h I have experience of writing about poems.				
i I have experience of reading poems aloud and sharing my ideas in class and small group discussion.				
j I have experience of selecting poems to link to one another .				
k I have experience of comparing and contrasting poems.				
l I have experience of writing a comparative exam essay about several poems.				
m I have experience of writing about unseen poems in an exam (poems not previously read or studied).				
n I have experience of using a 'clean' copy of a poetry anthology (ie one without my notes) in an exam.				
o I am familiar with and can use technical terminology when I am analysing poems (eg metaphor, caesura, onomatopoeia, personification).				

- 3 With a partner or with your teacher:
 - a explore your answers and identify which aspects of poetry (a–g in the chart) and which experiences or features of the way poetry is assessed (h–o) you feel most confident about at this stage
 - b focus on the points you need to gain more experience of for your exam. Talk about the boxes you ticked with specific reference to poems, classroom activities and assessments that you have previously completed. You may wish to colour code or shade in areas of particular strength or weakness and/or to add brief notes to your copy of the chart to remind you.

4 Keep your completed chart so you can revisit it later in the light of your developing experience.

In the rest of this section you will learn more about various poetic features (a–g in the chart above). You will also explore poems in different ways and begin to focus on how these areas will be assessed (h–o).

2 Type

When we talk, hear or read about a type of poetry, the word ‘type’ is being used to convey the general form, structure or distinguishing characteristics of a poem. Not all poems will conform to a ‘type’ but many do and there are many different types of poems. For example, one type is lyric poetry. This is poetry that expresses feeling and emotion rather than telling a story. It is the most commonly found type of poetry. Lyric poems are usually quite short and have a song-like quality due to their use of rhyming and rhythmical structures. ‘O, My Love is like a Red, Red Rose’ by Robert Burns and ‘Down by the Salley Gardens’ by W.B. Yeats are examples of lyric poetry.

Look at the chart below for some other different types.

Type of poetry	Examples
Metaphysical poetry	‘The Definition of Love’ by Andrew Marvell ‘The Flea’ by John Donne
Romantic poetry	‘Ode to a Nightingale’ by John Keats ‘She Walks in Beauty’ by Lord Byron
First World War poetry	‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ by Wilfred Owen ‘Glory of Women’ by Siegfried Sassoon
Protest poetry	‘The Rights of Woman’ by Anna Letitia Barbauld ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ by Percy Bysshe Shelley
Beat poetry	‘Howl’ by Allen Ginsberg ‘Constantly Risking Absurdity’ by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Bush poetry	‘The Man from Snowy River’ by A.B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson ‘My Country’ by Dorothea Mackellar

The types above are all associated with particular philosophical movements, historical periods, events or (as with Australian Bush poetry) geographical locations. The poems contain distinctive features of **form, structure, rhythm, rhyme**, language or imagery. They are often concerned with particular topics or themes that were of significance to the time when and/or the place where they were written, although many speak at least as directly to twenty-first-century readers as they did to the people of their own time.

Here are some more different types of poetry.

Type of poetry	Examples
Performance poetry – written to be performed to a listening audience, it has a distinctive rhythm and can be about a wide range of topics.	‘Dis Poetry’ by Benjamin Zephaniah ‘R.A.W.’ by Patience Agabi
Kinetic, shape or concrete poetry – with a distinctive shape or pattern on the page, which reflects the topic, kinetic poems seem to make words move in lively ways and need to be seen to be fully appreciated.	‘The Honey Pot’ by Alan Riddell (page 19) ‘Quiet Secret’ by Robert Froman
Found poetry – written by selecting words and phrases from a found object such as an advert, road sign, newspaper article or recipe. No other words are added and, in strict found poetry, the words have to be used in the same order as the original.	‘My Greenhouse’ and ‘Found Poem: Glasgow’ by Edwin Morgan

Key terms

sonnet
ballad
lyric
free verse
imagery
form
structure
rhythm
rhyme
performance poetry
kinetic, shape or
concrete poetry
found poetry

Activity 4

- 1 As a group, each find a copy of a different poem from those listed in either of the charts on page 7. Make a list of the distinctive features that suggest the poem belongs to a particular type.
- 2 Use your school, college or local library or the internet to locate at least one other example of the same type of poem for yourself and identify any of the same distinctive features you have already listed in 1.
- 3 Present your findings to your group and agree on a list of distinctive features for each of the types of poetry you have investigated.

Take it further

What other types of poetry can you discover and what distinctive features do they have? Search for other types (e.g. syllabic, pastoral, Georgian, satirical or love poetry). Use your school, college or local library or the internet to help you in your search. Make notes on their distinctive features for future reference and report back on your findings.

Independent research

When researching, look in a library for poetry anthologies that feature poems from specific periods or on particular themes. The websites listed below also provide some useful starting points. Make sure that you always cross check information gleaned from internet sites and acknowledge your sources.

- www.thepoetryhouse.org/Petryrooms/rooms.html
- www.poets.org/
- www.poetryarchive.org
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_poetry_groups_and_movements
- www.bushverse.com/

Further research will help you to consolidate your understanding. You will find that the type a poem falls into is often closely (but not exclusively) linked to a particular form or structure, and distinctive use of language, rhythm or rhyme. However, not all poems conform to any particular type at all and others can be considered to belong to more than one type. For example, a kinetic poem such as 'Easter Wings' by George Herbert is also seen as a Metaphysical poem. Poets borrow ideas and develop their writing from many different influences and you need to be alert to the ways poems conform to any particular type or how they might break the mould through their use of language and form.

This section has introduced you to the idea of types of poems. In the following sections you will have the chance to develop your understanding of the specific features of poetry that contribute to the overall effects and meanings created.

3 Form and structure

Form is the shape of the poem on the page. As you will probably already know from your experiences of reading and writing of poetry in KS3 and at GCSE, poetry can be written in many different forms. Traditional forms with a set number of lines or syllables, like sonnets or haikus, can be very tightly structured. Alternatively poets can adapt these forms and use them in a looser way or choose to write in free verse.

As you will see in Activity 5, poets have very different views about form. They might begin writing spontaneously and shape the poem into a particular form at a later stage, or they might make a very conscious choice about the poem's form early on during the drafting process – even before they have written a word. The finished form is always an important factor in terms of the poem's meaning and impact on the reader.

Poets on form

Activity 5

- 1 Read the comments about form below, written by five very different poets.
- 2 From your analysis of each comment, what can you conclude about each poet's views on the importance of form? Or about the connection between poetic form and a poem's subject matter? Add your key points to a copy of the table below.

Comment	What views on the place and importance of form in poetry are expressed?	What views on the relationship between poetic form and a poem's subject matter are expressed?
A		
B		

A 'I believe content determines form, and yet that content is discovered only *in* form. Like everything living, it is a mystery. The revelation of form itself can be a deep joy; yet I think form *as means* should never obtrude, whether from intention or carelessness, between the reader and the essential force of the poem, it must be so fused with that force.' (Denise Levertov, an English poet who emigrated to the US and wrote tightly structured, clearly expressed free verse)

B 'Form is a straitjacket in the way that a straitjacket was a straitjacket for Houdini.' (Paul Muldoon, an Irish writer, a professor of poetry and long-term resident in the US)

C 'You can't write a poem until you have a form. It's like ... trying to play an untuned instrument.' (Les Murray, a prize-winning Australian poet)

D 'I think there is a 'fluid' as well as a 'solid' content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely, and therefore, not properly rendered in symmetrical forms.' (Ezra Pound, a controversial and highly influential American writer who emigrated to London in 1909 with a mission to reinvent poetry in a form which, in his view, was truer to the rhythms of everyday life and experience; he made a significant contribution to the development of Modernism in poetry)

E 'I like to write in a patterned arrangement, with rhymes; stanza as it follows stanza being identical in number of syllables and rhyme-plan, with the first stanza... I have a liking for the long syllable followed by three (or more) short syllables, – 'lying on the air there is a bird,' and for the inconspicuous or light rhyme, – 'let' in flageolet ... I feel that form is the outward equivalent of a determining inner conviction, and that the rhythm is the person.' (Marianne Moore, an American poet who frequently used complicated syllabic forms)

For some poets, form is their first consideration as soon as they start to draft a poem, whereas for others the form becomes increasingly apparent as they begin to shape their words on the page. Some poets choose to adopt a form in the way it has been used traditionally. Others might use the spirit of the form, but adapt elements of its structure to suit their own purposes (eg unrhymed sonnets or **haikus** with 20 rather than 17 syllables). All poets' choices of form will be closely allied to the effects they want to create in their poems and the meanings they wish to convey to their readers.

Key term

haiku

Poetic forms

There are many forms a poem can take. Those listed in the next activity are the most common ones you will encounter, but there are others too.

Activity 6

- Which forms do you recognise from the descriptions below? First, match the poetic forms you recognise with their jumbled descriptions. You can use a photocopy of the two lists and cut out the elements like cards so that you can match them easily and make a collage as a record for future reference.
- Discuss the unknown forms as a class and decide on the correct descriptions.

Haiku	A A poem, written as a lament in memory of a person, place or even a way of life, that has a melancholy tone, but does not follow any set metrical pattern.
Limerick	B A five-lined poem, which usually tells the story of a character from a particular place, and has a distinctive rhythm and an <i>aabba</i> rhyme scheme .
Ballad	C A poem that addresses an object, event or element of landscape or a person, sometimes in an elevated style; modern versions of the form can be witty or even irreverent.
Sonnet	D A 19-line poem with an <i>aba</i> rhyme scheme, and five three-lined and one four-lined stanzas , in which lines from the first stanza are picked up and repeated in the rest of the poem.
Ode	E A 39-lined poem with six stanzas and a final three-lined envoi (summary), in which the six words in each stanza are repeated in a set pattern but a changing order.
Sestina	F Originally a Japanese form, a three-lined poem of 17 syllables often capturing a tiny moment in time.
Villanelle	G A 14-lined poem in iambic pentameter, usually following either a Shakespearean or Petrarchan form.
Ghazal	H Rhyming pairs of lines usually in iambic pentameter with ten alternately stressed syllables and a rhyme scheme progressing <i>aa bb cc</i> and so on; the strong rhyme scheme and very regular beat made it a popular choice for satirical or epigrammatic poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
Elegy	I A poem that tells a story or describes a series of events.
Free verse	J A narrative poem, often written in quatrains , with a tight rhyme scheme and a memorable rhythm, which usually tells a dramatic story (eg Broadside poetry, Literary and Folk ballads are all variations of this form).
Epigram	K A lengthy narrative poem that is heroic and written in an elevated style.
Blank verse	L A unrhymed poem written in iambic pentameter , said to mirror the rhythms of everyday speech.
Narrative poem	M A popular verse form in Urdu, which is increasingly used in English, consisting of at least five couplets; the first couplet has an <i>aa</i> structure with subsequent couplets <i>ba, ca, da</i> , etc; the final couplet traditionally includes a reference to the poet's real or literary name.
Epic	N Poetry that does not use traditional rhyme schemes or metrical arrangements.
Heroic couplets	O A short witty saying usually about an event or a person and written in very compressed language.

Forms can be governed or shaped by metrics, syllables, rhyme, the pattern to be created on the page or combinations of several of these factors.

Activity 7

- 1 Read the following poems, taking particular note of the form of each one and the effect this form has on the impact of the poem.
- 2 With a partner, discuss the following questions:
 - a What form do you think is being used in each case?
 - b The choice of form is integral to the meaning and the effects the poet wishes to create. Why do you think the poet chose the particular form?

Rain

On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
5 Since I was born in this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
10 Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
15 Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be for what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Edward Thomas

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
‘What a big book for such a little head!’
5 Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
10 You will not catch me reading any more:
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

In the village pond

In the village pond
the full moon is shaken by
the first falling leaf.

James Kirkup

Hoard

What kind of figure did he cut
huddled in the dusk, gut wound
packed with sphagnum,
as he sank into the bog
5 his offering of weaponry,
blades courteously broken,
his killed cherished swords?

Kathleen Jamie

The Sisters

We were two daughters of one race;
She was the fairest in the face.

The wind is blowing in turret and tree.
They were together, and she fell;
5 Therefore revenge became me well.
O, the earl was fair to see!

She died; she went to burning flame;
She mix'd her ancient blood with shame.

The wind is howling in turret and tree.
10 Whole weeks and months, and early and late,
To win his love I lay in wait.
O, the earl was fair to see!

I made a feast; I bade him come;
I won his love, I brought him home,

15 The wind is roaring in turret and tree.
And after supper on a bed,
Upon my lap he laid his head.
O, the earl was fair to see!

I kiss'd his eyelids into rest,
20 His ruddy cheeks upon my breast.
The wind is raging in turret and tree.
I hated him with the hate of hell,
But I loved his beauty passing well.
O, the earl was fair to see!

25 I rose up in the silent night;
I made my dagger sharp and bright.
The wind is raving in turret and tree.
As half-asleep his breath he drew,
Three time I stabb'd him thro' and thro'.
30 O, the earl was fair to see!

I curl'd and comb'd his comely head,
He looked so grand when he was dead.
The wind is blowing in turret and tree.
I wrapt his body in the sheet,
35 And laid him at his mother's feet.
O, the earl was fair to see!

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Preparing for the exam

- The ability to compare poems is a key skill you need to use in the exam. You may already have gained some experience at GCSE. Activity 9 will help you to develop your skills further.
- Make sure that you can identify the form of each of your chosen poems, and can comment on how the form impacts on its meaning.

- 3 Once you have explored the overall form and outer shape of each poem, reread them and look out for other distinctive features. Discuss the following questions with your partner.
- a Is there a noticeable rhyming pattern? If so, what effect does this have? If the poet has chosen not to rhyme, what does this enable the writer to do with lines and line ending?
 - b How would you describe the rhythm of each poem? How does it work to drive the poem along?
 - c What can you say about any other structural elements of each poem? Listen to the way the lines break up, stop, move and link together. What effect do they have on you and on the meanings conveyed?
 - d What other patterns or aspects of language do you notice?

Key term

Limerick	Epic
Ode	Heroic couplets
Sestina	rhyme scheme
Villanelle	stanza
Ghazal	envoi
Elegy	quatrain
Narrative poem	

Sonnets

Now let's look in more detail at the different ways poets use the sonnet form. The two most common forms – Shakespearean and Petrarchan – are outlined here, although you will also come across **Miltonic** and **Spenserian sonnets** as well as other unnamed variations on the form.

Key terms

Miltonic sonnet
Spenserian sonnet
volta

Shakespearean sonnets

Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem 'Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!' (page 11) is an example of a sonnet, in the form so expertly crafted by Shakespeare. Shakespearean sonnets have distinctive features:

- they consist of 14 lines
- each line is in iambic pentameter (a sequence of five soft and five hard stresses)
- they contain three quatrains which rhyme *abab cdcd efef*
- they contain a **volta**, a turn of thought in the poem which often occurs after the first two quatrains
- they end with a rhyming couplet: *gg*.

Activity 8

- 1 Reread 'Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!' and revisit what you have already discovered about its overall shape.
- 2 Now discuss other aspects of this poem with a partner. Use the following questions to help you:
 - a What effect does use of iambic pentameter have on how you hear the speaker's voice in the poem?
 - b How does the poet use the 'volta' in the poem to mark a change in mood?
 - c What impact does the final rhyming couplet have?
- 3 Write a short statement explaining how you think Millay has used the sonnet form.
- 4 Compare your statement with your partner's.

Activity 9

Now compare Millay's sonnet on page 11 with Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 138'; below.

- 1 First identify the features of the Shakespearean sonnet (as listed above), annotating a copy of each poem.

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
5 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides this is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
10 And, wherefore say not I that I am old?
O love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare

- 2 Now think about how Shakespeare uses the sonnet form. Consider the following questions to help you.
 - a How does the speaker in the poem present the relationship between the two lovers?
 - b What final statement is made about the relationship in the concluding couplet?
- 3 How does the presentation of the relationship in Shakespeare's sonnet compare with the way the partnership in Millay's sonnet is portrayed? Write a short paragraph explaining how each relationship seems to be presented and drawing at least one comparison between them.
- 4 Which sonnet did you personally find most difficult and which the most thought-provoking to read? Jot down a list of reasons for your preferences and discuss them in your group.

Petrarchan sonnet

Another widely used sonnet form is the Petrarchan, so called because it was first used by a fourteenth-century Italian poet named Petrarch who wrote a sonnet sequence for his beloved Laura. Petrarchan sonnets also have distinctive features:

- they consist of 14 lines
- they are written in **iambic pentameter**
- they are divided into two distinct parts: the first eight lines are an **octet** (eight lines of two quatrains, rhyming *abba abba*) and the final six are a **sestet** (rhyming *cdcdcd*)
- they include a 'turn' after the octet with the sestet offering a kind of resolution or answer to the problem or idea explored in the octet.

Key terms

octet
sestet
iambic pentameter

Activity 10

- 1 Read the example of a Petrarchan sonnet below.
- 2 Annotate the distinctive features of Petrarchan sonnets on a copy of the poem.

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge September 3rd, 1802

Earth has not anything to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
5 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
10 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth

Activity 11

- 1 Now read the following selection of four sonnets. Try to read each poem at least twice. Hear it in your head and also listen to it read aloud.

Grandfather

They brought him in on a stretcher from the world,
Wounded but humorous; and he soon recovered.
Boiler-rooms, rows upon rows of gantries rolled
Away to reveal a landscape of a childhood
5 Only he could recapture. Even on cold
Mornings he is up at six with a block of wood
Or a box of nails, discreetly up to no good
Or banging round the house like a four-year-old –

10 Never there when you call. But after dark
You hear his great boots thumping in the hall
And in he comes, as cute as they come. Each night
His shrewd eyes bolt the door and set the clock
Against the future, then his light goes out.
Nothing escapes him; he escapes us all.

Derek Mahon

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
10 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Sonnets from the Portuguese XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say,
'I love her for her smile ... her look ... her way
Of speaking gently, ... for a trick of thought
5 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' –
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee, – and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
10 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, –
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
They comfort long, and lose they love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Poem

And if it snowed and snow covered the drive
he took a spade and tossed it to one side.
And always tucked his daughter up at night.
And slipped her the one time that she lied.

5 And every week he tipped up half his wage.
And what he did not spend each week he saved.
And praised his wife for every meal she made.
And once, for laughing, punched her in the face.

10 And for his mum he hired a private nurse.
And every Sunday taxied her to church.
And he blubbed when she went from bad to worse.
And twice he lifted ten quid from her purse.

Here's how they rated him when they looked back:
sometimes he did this, sometimes he did that.

Simon Armitage

- 2 After reading, write a short statement answering each of these questions:
- Which sonnets follow either the Shakespearean or the Petrarchan forms in a strict fashion?
 - Which other rhyming patterns and verse structures can you find?
- 3 Add an example from one of the poems as evidence to support each of your statements.
- 4 Think about the effects that the strict sonnet form and the other patterns and structures have on what is expressed. Add your analysis or conclusion to each statement.
- 5 Add a sentence or two, drawing some conclusions about the way the sonnet form is used by the different poets. The following questions may help you.
- Why do you think each poet has written about the chosen subject matter in the form of a sonnet?
 - What conclusions can you come to about the way poets use sonnet forms to explore ideas, emotions and experiences?

Structural features: the inner workings of the poem

We cannot really say a certain sort of car has been well made or would be a good vehicle to drive just by taking a casual glance at it on a garage forecourt. We need to look under the bonnet at the mechanics, the engine. In addition, if we want to understand what it would be like to drive a car or whether it would be comfortable, relaxing, safe or thrilling to be a passenger in it, we have to experience the car on the road, take it for a test drive to hear and feel it in action. In the same way, to understand a poem's form and the effect it has on us, the readers, we need to do much more than look at the form that the poet has used. We need to hear how the words sound and knit together to make the poem perform in a certain way. We need to soak up its atmosphere and experience how its elements work together (or perhaps in opposition) to create this effect.

In the previous sub-sections on type and form, you have already begun to piece together key elements of a poem's make up and to understand how these work. In the rest of this section you will focus even further on the inner workings of the poem. But remember that these should not be written about in isolation from what has gone before.

You may already be familiar with some of the technical terms in the next sub-section. If you are, then take a moment just to refresh your memory and try to recall how and where you have seen and heard each term being used previously.

End-stopped lines

The punctuation at the end of **end-stopped lines** of poetry demarcates a short or long pause.

Activity 12

Look back at Simon Armitage's 'Poem' on page 15. Every line in this poem is end-stopped.

- 1 How does this make the poem sound when you read it aloud? Which of the following descriptions seem appropriate?

clipped	hesitant	sarcastic	matter of a fact	vague
negative	doubtful	positive	questioning	bleak

- 2 Write a short paragraph on how the poet's use of end-stopped lines influences your understanding of the poem.

Enjambement

Enjambement is used when a poet wants a line to run on to the next line rather than complete a line to create a particular effect, as in these lines from 'Hunting Snake' by Judith Wright:

Cold, dark and splendid he was gone
into the grass that hid his prey.

This technique can be used to create a number of different effects. It can help to place emphasis on key words and can add variety to the sound of the poem by breaking up the lines and mirroring speech patterns. Enjambement can also be used to reflect the thought processes of the narrator or the movement of an object (in this case, the disappearance of the snake).

Key terms

end-stopped lines
enjambement

Activity 13

- 1 Reread aloud the first six lines of 'Rain' by Edward Thomas on page 11.
 - a These lines are all one sentence. What do you notice about how the poem's narrator seems to be speaking to you?
 - b What impact do you think the full stop at the end of line 6 has?
- 2 Now imagine that Thomas had decided to end-stop some of these lines, as shown below. Read them aloud.

On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me,
Remembering again that I shall die,
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been,
5 Since I was born in this solitude.

- a How different does this end-stopped version sound from your reading of the published version with enjambement?
 - b How does it change the way the narrator is talking to you?
- 3 Now look again at the rest of 'Rain'. Thomas uses enjambement extensively in this poem, but he has made a deliberate decision to use end-stopped lines at certain points in the poem. Write a commentary identifying the end-stopped lines and saying why you think Thomas has made the decision to use them in each case.

Activity 14

- 1 Reread Kathleen Jamie's poem 'Hoard' on page 11. Notice how she has used enjambement at very specific points in the poem.
- 2 What do you notice about the positioning of the words 'cut' and 'wound', 'huddled' and 'packed' in the opening three lines?

What kind of figure did he cut
huddled in the dusk, gut wound
packed with sphagnum,

With a partner, discuss how the positioning of these words could link with the poem's subject.

- 3 Write a short statement describing the effect of the enjambement on you and the way you might read the poem.
- 4 Compare your statement with your partner's.

Independent research

If you want to find out more about different poetic forms, refer to: *The Poet's Craft: A Handbook of Rhyme, Metre and Verse* by Sandy Brownjohn, *The Making of a Poem* by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland or the detailed glossary at www.poetryarchive.org.

Take it further

Read poems written in as many different forms and structures as possible and experiment with writing poetry in different forms yourself.

Activity 15

Enjambement is a very valuable technique in a poet's toolkit. Read the next two poems – one very light-hearted, the other much more serious in tone. They are both about people and make extensive use of enjambement, but to create very different effects.

Discuss the use of enjambement in the two poems. What conclusions can you come to about why poets might choose to use enjambement and end-stopping?

Uncle Jed

Uncle Jed
Durham bred
raised pigeons
for money.

5 He died
a poor man
however

10 as the pigeons
were invariably
too quick for him.

Roger McGough

Evans

Evans? Yes, many a time
I came down his bare flight
Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
With its wood fire, where the crickets sang
5 Accompaniment to the black kettle's
Whine and so into the cold
Dark to smother in the thick tide
Of night that drifted about the walls
Of his stark farm on the hill ridge.

10 It was not the dark filling my eyes
And mouth appalled me; not even the drip
Of rain like blood from the one tree
Weather-tortured. It was the dark
Silting the veins of that sick man
15 I left stranded upon the vast
And lonely shore of his bleak bed.

R.S. Thomas

Key term

caesura

Caesura

A **caesura** is a slight pause that occurs approximately in the middle of a line of metrical verse (like a sonnet or heroic couplet). Sometimes the pause occurs naturally after a word, but on other occasions the line will be punctuated to dramatic effect and break up the rhythm. For example, the first line of Louis MacNeice's poem 'Prayer before Birth' is:

I am not yet born; O hear me.

The semi-colon in this line seems to stop the reader in their tracks and make them think about who is speaking, when and why.

Activity 16

Read the opening lines from 'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning, a much-anthologised and terrific dramatic monologue, which uses the heroic couplet form to tell a very disturbing tale. (You can read the rest of the poem on page 36.)

What do you think is the impact of the pauses shown in bold? Jot down your ideas and compare them with a partner's.

5 That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: **Frà Pandolf's hands**
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
'Will't please you sit and look at her?' I said

Line length and use of white space

All poets make decisions about the length of the lines they use, whether they are adhering to particular metrical or syllabic forms or choosing to use a seemingly looser structure. Within free verse poetry especially, poets have the freedom to make use of space in a line and on the page as a whole in a variety of ways.

Activity 17

Read the following three contrasting poems.

The Red Wheelbarrow
so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
5 glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.
William Carlos Williams

Opening the Cage

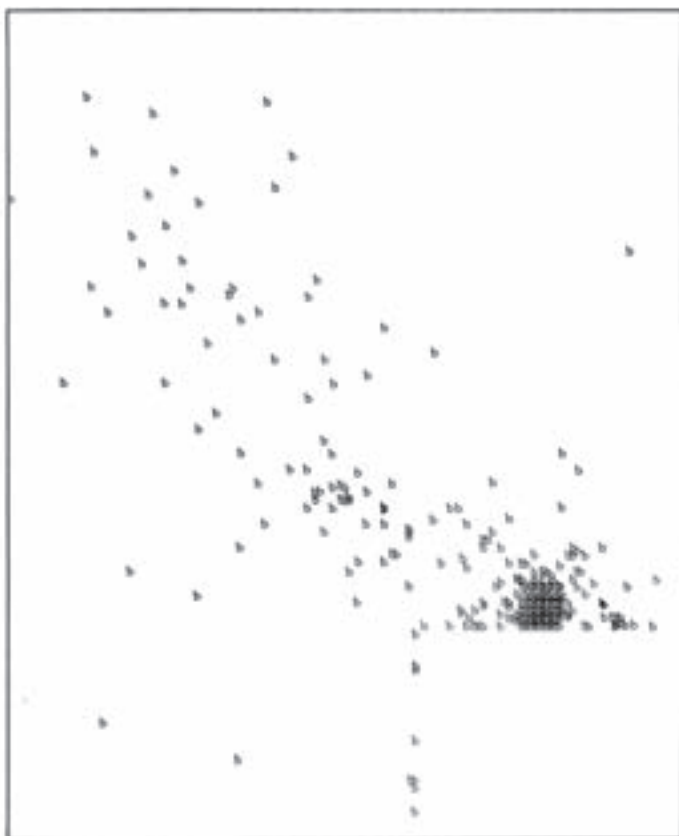
14 variations on 14 words

I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry

John Cage

I have to say poetry and is that nothing and am I saying it
I am and I have poetry to say and is that nothing saying it
I am nothing and I have poetry to say and that is saying it
I that am saying poetry have nothing and it is I and to say
5 And I say that I am to have poetry and saying it is nothing
I am poetry and nothing and saying it is to say that I have
To have nothing is poetry and I am saying that and I say it
Poetry is saying I have nothing and I am to say that and it
Saying nothing I am poetry and I have to say that and it is
10 It is and I am and I have poetry saying say that to nothing
It is saying poetry to nothing and I say I have and am that
Poetry is saying I have it and I am nothing and to say that
And that nothing is poetry I am saying and I have to say it
Saying poetry is nothing and to that I say I am and have it
Edwin Morgan

The Honey Pot



Alan Riddell

With a partner, discuss the following questions.

- What can you say about how the poets have used line lengths and spaces?
- What is your view of these poems?
- Are they poems? If you think so, what makes them poems? You might want to refer back to the section 'What is Poetry?' on page 4 to help you.

Activity 18

- 1 To conclude this section on form and structure, first read the following short text.

Midsummer, Tobago

Broad sun stoned beaches. White heat.
A green river. A bridge, scorched yellow
palms from the summer sleeping house
drowsing through August. Days I have held,
5 days I have lost, days that outgrow, like
daughters, my harbouring arms.

- 2 Now experiment with different ways of using form and line structure by turning the prose text into lines of poetry.
- 3 Read your draft aloud to a partner or to the rest of your group.
- 4 Compare your draft with other people's.
- 5 Discuss how and why you have made your decisions about form and structure and explore the different effects you have created.
- 6 Once you have shared your ideas, turn to page 28 and compare your poem with the original. Write a short statement or prepare a short presentation for the rest of your group in which you describe the differences and similarities, and explain why you think the poet has chosen to structure his words in this way.

4 Rhyme

Preparing for the exam

When you are writing about rhymes at the ends of lines or the rhyme scheme in a poem, you should use the common notation system. This is where you code each new rhyming word with a new letter of the alphabet. For example, if you look at the poems on the right, Herrick's poem would be annotated as *aa* and Dickinson's poem would be *abcb*.

Rhyme is when one sound is echoed by another sound exactly the same or very similar. It is a fundamental element of much of the language around us. It is important to remember that it is not exclusive to poetry: it is an essential part of the word play in many types of texts like adverts, slogans, sayings and football chants. In poetry, rhyme can be found in many different forms and is used for many different purposes and to create a variety of effects.

Different types of rhyme

Full rhyme

Full rhyme, or **perfect rhyme**, is where the vowel sounds at the end of lines echo each other exactly (eg 'sash/cash', 'imply/defy'). The rhyming words can be in different patterns such as in rhyming couplets, alternate lines or any of the more elaborate rhyme schemes found in sonnets, sestinas, villanelles, etc. For example:

Dreams

Here we are all, by day; by night we're hurl'd
By dreams, each one into a several world.
Robert Herrick

Pedigree

The Pedigree of Honey
Does not concern the Bee;
A Clover, any time to him
Is Aristocracy.
Emily Dickinson

Take it further

Invent a rhyme scheme of your own and then challenge yourself to write a poem using it. Annotate your finished poem to show the effects of the rhyme scheme.

Activity 19

- 1 Look at a small selection of other rhyming poems in your examination collection. Work out their rhyme schemes and think about why the poets might have chosen to use these schemes.
- 2 Discuss your findings with a partner and agree on your conclusions.
- 3 As a class or in a group, share your ideas for future reference.

Half rhymes

Half rhymes, or **para-rhymes**, usually occur where the consonant sounds at the end of lines match, rather than the vowel sounds (eg 'flesh/flash', 'yours/years'). However, you will also hear this term used more broadly to refer to vowel sounds that sound similar, but are not an exact match (eg 'mask/pass' or 'sense/meant').

Sight rhymes

Sight rhymes are half rhymes that look on the page like they should be a full rhyme, but the words actually sound differently when spoken (eg 'now/know', 'plough/tough').

Key terms

full rhyme
perfect rhyme
half rhyme
para-rhyme
sight rhyme

Activity 20

Who in your class can come up with the longest list of potential half rhymes and sight rhymes? Individually, list as many as you can in two minutes. Compare your lists as a class and see who has got the longest list. Take a vote on the best and worst examples!

Activity 21

The First World War poet Wilfred Owen makes very assured use of full, half and sight rhymes in his work.

- 1 Read his poem 'Arms and the Boy' and, on a copy, highlight the different types of rhyme you have identified in different colours.
- 2 Say the half rhymes aloud and listen to their sounds.
- 3 Consider how you would write about them.
 - a How would you describe the sound of each pair of half rhymes? What differences are there in the sounds they make? For example, read the first stanza again. Listen to the difference between 'flash' and 'flesh' here. Both begin with the same 'fl' sound, but you might think that one seems to have an open expansive, lingering 'ash' sound whereas the 'esh' sound seems softer or quieter.
 - b Now think about the effect of the half rhymes. Why do you think Owen made these deliberate choices? In your view, how, if at all, do the sounds contribute to the overall meaning/effects of the poem? Is Owen perhaps wanting to say something about the nature of life and death, innocence and the grim reality of war, or something else through his use of these sounds?
- 4 Write a short commentary about Owen's choice of half rhymes and their effectiveness in the poem.

Arms and the Boy

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with the hunger of blood;
Blue, with all malice, like a madman's flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

5 Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth,
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

10 For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heel,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

Wilfred Owen

Independent research

Refer to other poems by Owen for further examples of skilful rhyming. To consolidate your understanding, you might also want to investigate poems by Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin or W. B. Yeats, to explore how other poets use full and half rhymes to create different effect.

Key term

internal rhyme

Internal rhymes

Words that rhyme within a line or adjacent lines (rather than at the end) are called **internal rhymes**. This technique can help a poet to create a particular mood in a poem. Examples of internal rhyme being used for comic effect can be seen in this extract from 'The Cliché Kid' by Carol Ann Duffy.

Distraught in autumn, kneeling under the chestnut trees,
seeing childhood in the conkers through my tears.
Bonkers. And me so butch in my boots down the macho bars ...

Preparing for the exam

Always remember to use the term 'stanza', rather than 'verse', when discussing or writing about poetry. It is a much more precise term.

Take it further

- Look back at some of the poems in this section in the light of this room metaphor. What kind of building do you think the stanzas or rooms combine to create in each case?
- Next time you are listening to music, see if you can identify song lyrics that seem to make effective use of rhyme as well as those where a rhyming word seems to be out of place or just chosen for the sake of it.

Duffy is a poet who uses internal rhyme quite frequently in her writing, although not always in a comic way. Read her poems 'Disgrace' and 'Mean Time' on pages 33 and 44 to explore further how she uses this technique.

Other rhyme terms

When writing about rhyme, you will also want to use other terms that describe how rhyming lines are arranged into groups:

Couplet: a pair of lines

Quatrain: a group of four lines

Sestet: a group of six lines

Octave: a group of eight lines

Stanza: any unit of rhyme and/or metre used in a repeated pattern in a poem.

For example, Owen's poem 'Arms and the Boy' has three stanzas, all quatrains. Stanzas in a poem can consist of lines of the same or different lengths. They work separately, but also cumulatively to build the sense of the poem. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland have written a very helpful description of the stanza:

the word stanza in Italian means 'room'. In a simple, practical way, the stanza has that figurative purpose. It is as self-contained as any chamber or room. And yet to be in it is to have the consciousness at all times that it also leads somewhere.

Why use rhyme?

Sometimes rhyme can be almost unnoticeable in a poem, whereas on other occasions it contributes to the harmonious feel of the poem and helps it to move along. Sometimes a poet can over use a rhyme or a particular rhyming sound either for deliberate effect or unintentionally. Alternatively a poet might choose a word just because it rhymes rather than because it really contributes anything original to a poem.

In conclusion

Activity 22

- 1 Read the following poem by Jackie Kay, preferably two or three times and aloud at least once.
- 2 Share your ideas on these discussion points, making notes for later use.
 - a What different types of rhymes can you find in this poem?
 - b Do any of the rhymes have associations for you?
 - c What do you hear and notice in the lines where Jackie Kay has used rhyme and in those where she has chosen not to use it?
 - d How and what do you think the use of rhyme contributes to the mood of the poem?

- e What else do you want to say about the way this poem is written? You might want to consider the words Kay has chosen, the repetitions, the rhythms of the lines or her reasons for writing the poem.
- 3 Use your notes to help you write about Kay's use of rhyme and its effectiveness in the poem. Remember to describe the types of rhyme she uses, giving examples from the poem. You should explain how you have responded to the examples and analyse what effect they have.

Childhood, Still

The sun is out and so is childhood – remember
How the summer droned its song forever.

Three small girls tumble down the steep hill.
Grass skip, gust makes their skirts frill.

5 A wee boy scoots towards the big blue loch.
His fishing net bigger than his baw face.

It's hot; there's a breeze like a small caught breath.
This is it; these are the days that never stop.

10 *Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

A boy kicks a ball through a window, smashes
a gaping hole, but this is childhood still

where big things grow small; small as a petal
or a freckle, on a face, a speckle

15 on a egg, or as small as a tadpole,
small as the space where the ball missed the goal,

as dot to dot, as a crumb of Mrs Jack's cake,
small as the silver locket around her neck.

20 The long grass whines in the high wind.
Away in the distance, the church bells chime.

*Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

Suddenly: the clatter of boots in the street.
The sob of a white van speeding away.

25 The cries of a small boy alone in a stairwell.
This is childhood; this is childhood as well.

The policeman caught by the Candyman.
A town's sleep murdered by the Sandman.

30 There goes the janitor, the teacher, the priest,
Clergyworker, childminder, careworker. *Wheesht.*

The auntie, the uncle, the father, the mother;
opening and closing and opening the door.

*Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

35 *Oh There she goes.*

Oh There she goes.

Peerie heels and pointed toes.

Look at her feet. She thinks she's neat.

Black stockings and dirty feet.

40 Remember the toadstool, the promise of a chrysalis,
the taste of lemon bonbons, the taste of liquorice.

The past keeps calling the children back.
Number six: pick up sticks. Tick tack. Tick tack.

45 The clock hands crawl, August's slow talk.
Autumn comes: the snap and crackle of amber leaves.

There's a brand new friend waiting in the school,
a gleam in her eye, ready for Tig or marbles.

Skip, skop to the barber's shop, Keepie-Uppie, Kerbie.
Be Baw Babbity, Following Wee Jeannie.

50 Green peas and Barley. Okey Kokey. My mummy told me.
Stotty. Peever. Thread the needle. The Big Ship sails.

This is childhood, let it be childhood still.

Jackie Kay

5 Rhythm

Poets can make many choices about the way they want their poems to sound. One of the major decisions they make is about the rhythm – the flow and beat of the sounds within the poem and the way these are grouped together to create an effect – just as musicians arrange patterns of sounds to make music.

The rhythm of a poem is what drives it along. Philip Hobsbaum describes rhythm as 'the working machinery of poetry as its metre is its ground plan or blueprint'. The number of times a dominant rhythm occurs in a line of poetry gives it its **metre**, governed by the number of stresses or strong syllables in a line and the pattern that they form. The metre is just one element of the rhythm of a poem. Think of it as being the framework or skeleton that supports it.

Key term

metre

Iambic pentameter

The most common form of metre in English poetry is iambic pentameter. This is a pattern of one weak or lightly stressed syllable followed by one strongly stressed syllable. Each **iamb** (the pattern of soft hard) forms one **foot**. Iambic *pentameter* therefore has five feet, which sets up the familiar pattern:

di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum
soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>

You can see iambic pentameters at work in the following extracts from 'Sonnet 130' by William Shakespeare and 'The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales' by Geoffrey Chaucer, where the stressed syllables have been underlined:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun ('Sonnet 130')

Ful big he was of braun, and eek of bones ('The General Prologue')

Iambic pentameter is the metre used in **blank verse** and in the rhymed forms, the villanelle and the sestina. (For more on blank verse, see Part 3, pages 139–141 (in a separate volume).)

Independent research

Find copies of the four poems referred to on this page (they are all widely available). Read them aloud and listen to the way their rhythms work.

Iambic tetrameter

Iambic tetrameter is the metre used in most ballad forms.

Activity 23

- 1 Look at the following example from Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'. How many iambic feet does it have? What effect does the rhythm have?

Had we but world enough, and time
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

- 2 Find a copy of the poem. Read it aloud and listen to the rhythm. What effect does it have on the subject of the poem?
- 3 The first and third lines of most traditional ballads will have four stresses. The second and fourth will have three stresses (**iambic trimeter**). Here is an example from the ballad 'Sir Patrick Spens' (Anon) which should help to confirm for you how many iambic feet there are in each line:

They had not sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
Came wind and weet and snow and sleet
And gurly grew the sea.

gurly – rough

Other patterns

It can be helpful to identify other patterns of stresses in poetry, although the iamb is the most important type of metre for your exam. Other patterns found in feet are:

- **Trochee** – two syllables: one stressed followed by one unstressed syllable
- **Spondee** – two stressed syllables in succession
- **Anapaest** – three syllables: two unstressed followed by one stressed syllable
- **Dactyl** – three syllables: one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables
- **Amphibrach** – three syllables: one unstressed followed by one stressed and rounded off with one unstressed syllable.

Metre is just one element of a poem. Poets play around with it to create different effects and emphases, but a lot more than its metre goes into creating a poem's movement (eg also think about the use of enjambement (page 16) and caesuras (page 18) to link together or to break up lines).

Key terms

iamb
foot
iambic tetrameter
trochee
spondee
anapaest
dactyl
amphibrach
blank verse
iambic trimeter

Take it further

- Look at the following words and say them aloud. Which are iambs, trochees, anapaests, dactyls or amphibrachs?

understand	fingers	impound
mobile	confetti	builder
aloud	argument	mesmerise
backward	orange	incline

Now suggest another word as an example in each category.

- Write a brief description of rhythm and metre explaining these two poetic features in simpler terms, eg for a course guide for GCSE students.

Preparing for the exam

When you are writing about the rhythm of a poem, you need to be able to comment on the impact that it has on you as the reader. How do the words work together to create the rhythm? What effect does this have on the tone and mood of the poem, and on its overall meaning? You will need to read poems aloud to hear this at first. Even though you will not be able to do this in the exam, it is a good habit to get into before discussing any of the poems in this section.

Activity 24

- 1 Read the following poems aloud to a partner or in a small group. If you are in a group, you could practise reading them together as a chorus or by using different volumes and combinations of voices, and by varying your pitch and tone so that you bring the poems off the page and can hear their rhythms.

simple tings

(for Miss Adlyn and Aunt Vida)

de simple tings of life, mi dear
de simple tings of life

she rocked the rhythms in her chair
brushed a hand across her hair
miles of travel in her stare

de simple tings of life

ah hoe mi corn
an de backache gone
plant mi peas
arthritis ease

de simple tings of life

leaning back
she wiped an eye
read the rain signs
in the sky
evening's ashes
in a fireside

de simple tings of life

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

	Men Talk (Rap)		I like A Woman
	Women		Who likes me enough
	Rabbit rabbit rabbit women	25	Not to nitpick
	Tattle and titter		Not to nag and
	Women prattle		Not to interrupt 'cause I call that treason
5	Women waffle and witter		A woman with the Good Grace
	Men Talk. Men Talk.	30	To be struck dumb
	Women into Girl Talk		By me Sweet Reason. Yes –
	About Women's Trouble		A Man Likes a Good Listener
	Trivia 'n' Small Talk		A Real
10	They yap and they babble		Man
	Men Talk. Men Talk.		Likes a Real Good Listener
	Women gossip Women giggle	35	Women yap yap yap
	Women niggle-niggle-niggle		Verbal Diarrhoea is a Female Disease
	Men Talk.		Women she spread she rumours round she
	Women yatter		Like Philadelphia Cream Cheese.
15	Women chatter	40	Oh
	Women chew the fat, women spill the beans		Bossy Women Gossip
	Women aint been takin'		Girlish Women Giggle
	The oh-so Good Advice in them		Women natter, women nag
20	Women's Magazines.		Women niggle niggle niggle
	A Man Likes A Good Listener.	45	Men talk.
	Oh yeah		Men
			Think First, Speak later
			Men Talk.
			<i>Liz Lochhead</i>

- 2 Discuss what you have noticed about the way the words work. Make notes or annotate copies of the poems as you discuss them. Start with the following questions and then broaden your discussion to include other aspects you have noticed.
 - How does Breeze convey a rocking rhythm in her poem through her choice of words and the way she has constructed the lines?
 - How does Lochhead create the different sounds of the women's and men's speech through her language?
- 3 Discuss how the punctuation and/or the line breaks help to shape meaning, again making notes or annotating copies. The following questions may help to get you started.
 - Why do you think Breeze uses so few punctuation marks in the whole of her poem?
 - How does Lochhead use the caesura in the penultimate line?
 - How is she representing her view of the way men speak?
 - How does this contrast with her lines about women's speech?
- 4 Discuss the effects any repetitions have on the way you read and understand each poem. Record your thoughts as before.
- 5 Write three short paragraphs in response to the poems, comparing the effects that the words, punctuation and line breaks, and repetition have on their rhythm. For each feature, make a point about how it is used in one of the poems, giving an example. Then compare the use of the same feature in the other poem, giving another example. Draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the feature, before moving on to the next one.

6 Language

When you discuss or write about a poet's choice and use of language, you are exploring the essence of a text: without the words (and the spaces between them), there would be no poem.

Looking closely at diction

Activity 25

- 1 With a partner, investigate the bank of words in the box below by answering the following questions. You might like to use coding or highlighting on a photocopy or even to cut out the individual words to help you. Make notes on your findings.
 - a What do the words reveal to you about the choices the poet made?
 - b What conclusions can you come to about the language used? Are there, for example, particular types of words? Could you group them in different ways? Do certain words occur very frequently?
 - c Does the poet perhaps seem preoccupied with a theme or subject?

Words from 'Children's Song' (including the title)

A adult all amused an analytic and and And and And
asleep blue cannot centre Children's closed cupped dance
eavesdrop eggs enter Even eye faded find flower For hands
heaven in in is is knees life live look mock nest Of Of
on our our own play probe pry remoter shell small smooth
Song still stoop subterfuge Talk that That The the the the
the the though to too Under Under We we we Where
where Where With With world world you you You your

- 2 Present your ideas to the rest of your group.
- 3 Either individually or with a partner, use the words in the box to draft your own poem entitled 'Children's Song'. You can organise the words in any way you wish and add any punctuation you require.
- 4 Share your draft poem with another reader. Ask them to read it aloud to you. Discuss how you have ordered the words and why, including:
 - the effects you were striving for
 - which lines or phrases you are most happy with
 - which lines need further development
 - which words you found most challenging to include and why
 - if you were tempted to add other words, why and what they were.

Activity 26

- 1 Now read the original poem 'Children's Song' by R.S. Thomas.
- 2 Make notes on how the poet has ordered the words, punctuated them and structured the poem. Add your ideas on what effects and/or meanings have been created.
- 3 Now compare the effects and meanings of Thomas' poem with those of your own draft. How has Thomas used the words in his poem? Write one sentence about each point you want to make about Thomas' poem, adding evidence from the poem to support your point. Now look at your own draft. What effects have you created through your use of language? How does your version compare with the original? You may have used the words very differently! Make a separate comment on each effect you have created and then, where possible, make a comparison between the two poems, before moving on to your next point.
- 4 How do you think the activities in this section (your word bank investigation, the drafting of your own poem and the comparison of two versions) have helped you to develop your understanding of the language of poetry more fully?
- 5 There is another poem on the subject of childhood by Jackie Kay on page 27. Compare it with 'Children's Song'. Which do you prefer? Which do you think uses language in the most interesting ways? Write a commentary, comparing the two poems.

Children's Song

We live in our own world,
A world that is too small
For you to stoop and enter
Even on hands and knees,
5 The adult subterfuge.
And though you probe and pry
With analytic eye,
And eavesdrop all our talk
With an amused look,
10 You cannot find the centre
Where we dance, where we play,
Where life is still asleep
Under the closed flower,
Under the smooth shell
15 Of eggs in the cupped nest
That mock the faded blue
Of your remoter heaven.

R.S. Thomas

Many of you will already be familiar with much of the terminology you need to use in discussing and writing about the language used in poetry. Indeed, many of the terms are not used just to talk about poetry texts. You should aim to use them confidently in all aspects of textual study.

Midsummer, Tobago

Broad sun stoned beaches.

White heat.

A green river.

5 A bridge,
scorched yellow palms
from the summer sleeping house
drowsing through August.

Days I have held,
days I have lost,

10 days that outgrow, like daughters,
my harbouring arms.

Derek Walcott

Solution to
Activity 18, page 20.

Activity 27

Working in a small group, decide which of the following definitions most accurately describe each technical term. Be careful – in some cases two of the three answers are correct.

Terms	Definitions
Alliteration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> repetition of consonant sounds repetition of hyphenated words repetition of 'lit' sounds
Assonance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> repetition of consonant sounds repetition of vowel sounds repetition of 'a' sounds
Diction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the correct use of English the choice of words made by a writer a synonym for the word 'vocabulary'
Ellipsis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a phrase or sentence where words are missed out but can be inferred from the surrounding context three dots to show words are missed out or to indicate suspense the repetition of 'el' sounds
Irony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> language that says one thing but means another language that lacks emotion language that is flat and uninspiring
Onomatopoeia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> words that make a booming sound words that make an echoing sound words that replicate or mimic the sound they are making
Oxymoron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a contrasting word or phrase that contains two elements with opposite meanings a phrase that makes something difficult seem easy a phrase used by someone to show their anger
Sibilance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the sound of snakes repetition of 's' sounds the use of sinister sounds in poetry

If you are uncertain about any of the terms, refer to the glossary and discuss them with your teacher. If you are already confident about these terms, ensure that you use them in class discussion as well as in your writing about poetry.

Preparing for the exam

Find examples of the techniques listed in Activity 27 in use in your exam collection.

Write a short commentary on the effects created through their use.

Language toolkit for writing in the exam

When you talk about the language of a poem, you should be able to focus on a number of different aspects, many of which are interlinked. You should be concerned with:

- the choice of words a poet makes and why they have chosen particular words rather than others
- the **syntax** of the poem (the way the words are arranged into phrases, questions, statements, commands, dialogue, sentences, lines, stanzas and whole poems)
- how the language is punctuated (or not)
- the patterning of words (eg whether words are repeated, contrasted with one another or juxtaposed)
- the sounds of the words (the way they rhyme, create a particular tone and mood, might echo other words in the poem, introduce, repeat or reinforce specific sounds)

Key terms

diction
 ellipsis
 irony
 onomatopoeia
 oxymoron
 sibilance
 syntax
 simile
 metaphor
 personification

- whether the vocabulary and/or the phrasing are associated with a particular time, place, situation, person, group of people (and/or whether it is being used to deliberately evoke such things)
- who (or what) is speaking the words and how their language addresses the reader
- what may be left unsaid but can be inferred from the language that is present
- the types of lexical and grammatical words used (eg verbs and/or adjectives extensively or rarely used).

Activity 28

Now use the toolkit above as a checklist to help you to explore the language of at least one of the poems in the form and structure pages (8–20) of this section. Choose one poem, reread it several times and write at least two sentences for each of the bullet points in the toolkit.

7 Imagery

Preparing for the exam

Whenever you are writing about any aspect of language or literature you must do more than simply identify the features used. To write a successful answer you should explore *how* and *why* a poet uses language. What is the purpose? Why has the choice been made? How do the effects that the poet creates impact on you, the reader?

Imagery is the creation of pictures in language, which help us to visualise something or appeal to our senses so that we can hear, feel or see an idea or subject for ourselves. The best images help us to view or experience the idea afresh or in a different way. A lot of poetry is rich in imagery and some critics have argued that contemporary English poetry is essentially poetry of the eye, whereas poets from other nations (or those writing in other times) can be more concerned with writing for the ear.

Simile and metaphor

You should already be familiar with the terms '**simile**', '**metaphor**' and '**personification**', which are essential when writing about imagery in poetry. We will look at simile and metaphor in more detail here, and personification on page 34. A simile is a comparison between two things that are not usually compared and uses the words 'as' or 'like' (eg in the poem 'Wind', Ted Hughes describes the movement of the wind as 'flexing like the lens of a mad eye'). Metaphor is a comparison between seemingly unrelated things. Metaphors create a much stronger, more definite image than a simile because one object is transformed into the other, eg 'she was my rock'. The use of the verb 'to be' in some form or tense can be an indicator that there is a metaphor in a poem.

Activity 29

- 1 Read the poem 'Praise Song for My Mother' by Grace Nichols at least twice and note her use of powerful metaphorical language to praise her mother.
- 2 Reread the poem and identify the metaphors in it. What can you say about the metaphors Nichols has created? What might they reveal about her feelings for her mother or about the context of their relationship?
- 3 The metaphors are interspersed throughout the poem in each stanza apart from the last. What impact does this seem to have on:
 - the rhythm of the poem
 - the overall effects and meanings created?

Praise Song for My Mother

You were
water to me
deep and bold and fathoming

You were
moon's eye to me
pull and grained and mantling

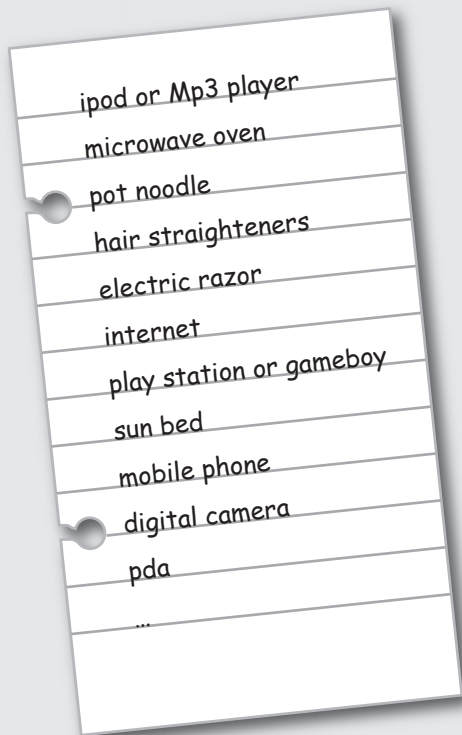
You were
sunrise to me
rise and warm and streaming

You were
the fishes red gill to me
the flame tree's spread to me
the crab's leg/the fried plantain smell

replenishing, replenishing
Go to your wide futures, you said
Grace Nichols

Activity 30

- 1 Another poet whose early work is particularly rich in metaphorical imagery is Craig Raine. Read his poem below.
- 2 After this poem was published, some critics said Raine belonged to the Martian school of poetry because of his particular use of metaphor which enabled readers to look at the world through different eyes.
 - a In a sequence of metaphors in this poem, Raine is describing aspects of everyday life. List the everyday aspects or objects he includes.
 - b Write a sentence or two about each object, explaining how Raine's use of metaphor makes you think about it differently.
- 3 If this poem had been written in the twenty-first century, it may well have included other everyday items. Choose two or three from the list on the left and draft some additional stanzas for the poem. Try to imitate Raine's style (including his use of metaphor) as closely as you can.
- 4 Now share your metaphors with other readers. Which are the most successful?



A Martian Sends a Postcard Home

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings –

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

5 I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on the ground:

10 then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colour darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside –
a key is turned to free the world

15 for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box ticking with impatience.

20 In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

25 Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room
with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises
alone. No one is exempt
30 and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves –
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

Craig Raine

The term '**extended metaphor**' might be new to you. This is when the metaphor, the comparison between two objects, is developed throughout the poem, rather than in just a line or two, in order to explore it more fully.

Activity 31

- 1 Read William Blake's poem below. See if you can identify the extended metaphor within it, which explores an aspect of human nature.



William Blake

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath – my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not – my wrath did grow.
5 And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears,
And I sunned it with my smiles.
And with soft deceitful wiles.
And it grew both day and night,
10 Till it bore an apple bright,
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,
And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole.
15 In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.
William Blake

- 2 Write a short statement to explain how you think Blake has used the extended metaphor to explore an abstract human emotion. To begin to answer this question you will need to:
 - a look at how he has used and developed the metaphor in each stanza in order to focus on different aspects of the emotion he is representing;
 - b think about why he might have chosen a natural image to represent this human feeling.

Take it further

The literary critic I. A. Richards suggests the following three part model for analysing metaphor (his system is not agreed on by everyone, however):

- Tenor – the thing which the metaphor is describing or characterising – its first term;
- Vehicle – the thing which is being used to describe or characterise the tenor – its second term;
- Ground – the quality which the tenor and vehicle share which makes the metaphor 'work'.

For example, in the metaphor 'No man is an island, entire of itself', the tenor is 'man', the vehicle 'an island' and the ground could be said to be 'separateness' or 'isolation'.

Look again at some of the poems you have been exploring. What does thinking about metaphors in this way add to your understanding of the ways in which imagery is used?

Preparing for the exam

Imagery is a prominent feature of many poems. It contributes to the richness of poetry and enables us to experience ideas and events differently through language. Explore how other images have **been created** in the poems in your collection. Why have the poets chosen them and what effects they have created?

Personification

Writers and poets use personification when they present an inanimate object or an idea as having human qualities and feelings.

Activity 32

- 1 Read the following poem by Carol Ann Duffy several times.

Disgrace

But one day we woke to disgrace; our house
a coldness of rooms, each nursing
a thickening cyst of dust and gloom.
We had not been home in our hearts for months.
5 And how our words changed. Dead flies in a web.
How they stiffened and blackened. Cherished italics
suddenly sour on our tongues, obscenities
spraying themselves on the wall in my head.
Woke to your clothes like a corpse on the floor,
10 the small deaths of lightbulbs pining all day
in my ears, their echoes audible tears;
nothing we would not do to make it worse
and worse. Into the night with the wrong language,
waving and pointing, the shadows of hands
15 huge in the bedroom. Dreamed of a naked crawl
from a dead place over the other; both of us. Woke.
Woke to the absence of grace; the still-life
of a meal, untouched, wine-bottle, empty, ashtray,
full. In our sullen kitchen, the fridge
20 hardened its cool heart, selfish as art, hummed.
To a bowl of apples rotten to the core. Lame shoes
empty in the hall where our voices asked
for a message after the tone, the telephone
pressing its ear to distant, invisible lips.
25 And our garden bowing its head, vulnerable flowers
unseen in the dusk as we shouted in silhouette.
Woke to the screaming alarm, the banging door,
the house-plants trembling in their brittle soil. Total
disgrace. Up in the dark to stand at the window,
30 counting the years to arrive there, faithless,
unpenitent. Woke to the meaningless stars, you
and me both, lost. Inconsolable vowels from the next room.
Carol Ann Duffy

- 2 Write a response to this poem, identifying where and how Carol Ann Duffy has used personification and, most importantly, why you think she has used this technique. Remember to use evidence from the poem to support your views. The following questions may help you.
 - What inanimate objects and concepts have been given human attributes and feelings?
 - How has Duffy used the personification of these things to explore the breakdown of a relationship?
 - What else do you notice about Duffy's use of imagery in this poem?
 - What are your views about the poem's title?

8 Voice

Key term

voice

The term 'voice' is often used in relation to poetry and refers to the speaker or thinker who is expressing a view, the person who is talking to you, the reader. The voices used in poetry can be many and varied. Be careful not to assume, when reading a poem for the first time, that the poet is speaking in their own voice and that everything they express directly reflects their own feelings or experiences. To some extent, all writers draw on their own lives in their writing, but remember that poems are constructed creations and the voices a poet chooses to use are part of this construction.

Decisions about voice are not made in isolation: in creating a voice for a poem, a poet draws on all the other aspects that we have explored so far. A poet chooses the voices that are most appropriate for what they want to express and select the form, language, imagery, etc. that best fits each voice.

Creating a voice

There are no taboos in terms of what poetry can give voice to. Poets can give all kinds of objects, concepts and people voices in their poems.

Activity 33

- 1 Choose one of the voices and situations in the box below. With a partner, and jotting down significant words and phrases as you talk, discuss:
 - a how the voice might speak in this context
 - b how it might view the world
 - c what concerns it might have about past or future events
 - d how it would express these views and concerns.

A traffic cone in motorway roadworks.
A young horse taking part in the Grand National.
A single coathanger in an empty wardrobe.
A father who is holding his child for the first time.
A grandmother thinking back to her childhood.
A fox on the prowl in a city.
A fire fighter entering a burning building.
A ten pence piece down the back of a sofa.
A student waiting outside the head teacher's office.
A pond filled with frogspawn.
Someone preparing to claim asylum in an airport terminal.
An identical twin on his or her 18th birthday.
A parachutist waiting to jump.
A tree about to be chopped down.

- 2 Shape your words and phrases into the rough draft of a poem. File your draft safely while you read and discuss the following poems. They should give you some ideas about how different voices can be brought to life on the page, so that you can revise and finish your poem later.

Activity 34

- 1 Working in a small group, read the six very different poems that follow and then choose one for your group to work on in more detail.

A Fish-Hook

You have put a fish-hook in my chest behind the
breast bone,
and one barb is around my gullet, and one around my
wind-pipe and the third is embedded in the root of
the aorta.

5
There is a cord attached, of tantalum-hardened steel,
marvellously supple,
and the least movement you make, that cord tightens,
the tip of each barb jerks deeper, the blood eddies
around the metal.

10
You have the other end of that cord, you have hidden it,
inside your skull or at the base of your spine,
and though your hands are empty, you are winding it in,
and my mouth is dry as I flounder towards you.

Gael Turnbull

Mirror

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

5
I am not cruel, only truthful –
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

10
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns back to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

15
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Sylvia Plath

The Self-Unseeing

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

5
She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

10
Child-like, I danced in a dream;
Blazings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

Thomas Hardy

My Last Duchess

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – which I have not – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and make excuse,
– E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning

9 Tone and mood

Tone and **mood** are the aspects of a text that some students find most challenging to write about. The activities on the following pages should confirm that you do already know something about these terms and will help to develop your understanding of them.

Activity 36

Let's start by thinking about tone. Individually or with a partner, think about or discuss the following points.

- If someone says to you 'Don't speak to me in that tone of voice!', what do you think they are implying about the way you have spoken to them? Read the sentence aloud. Does that give you any further clues?
- How do you think the speaker has arrived at that view of your tone? Is it because of your choice of words? Is it because of how you have spoken to them? Is it as a result of something else?
- What do you think they mean by the word 'tone'?

Activity 37

- 1 Working in a small group, take it in turns to say the sentence 'Please, will you help me?' aloud in different tones from the box below and others you can think of. Note that some of the tones have very subtle differences (eg sinister and mysterious). Don't tell the rest of the group what tone you are using – let them guess.

desperate	sarcastic	uncertain	resigned	puzzled
hopeful	angry	romantic	bored	grieving
casual	sinister	mysterious	confident	enigmatic

- 2 Discuss:

- how your voices changed when you adopted different tones
- how you used the punctuation in the sentence
- what different emphases you placed on the words depending on the tone you chose.

Key term

tone
mood

In real life, when we adopt different tones, they reveal different facets of our personality in different situations. In literary texts, writers use a variety of tones to help to convey the complexity of the voice(s) or situations as well as the mood in an individual work (whether it is a poem, play or any other form).

Definitions

The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines tone as 'a characteristic sound made by a voice, instrument etc ...; a sound having a definite pitch or character ...; the quality or luminosity of colour, a shade, a tint ...; a style of speech or writing regarded as reflecting a person's mood, attitude or personality; a mood or attitude conveyed by an author's style.'

Mood is defined as 'the atmosphere or pervading tone of a place, event, composition, etc; one inducing a certain state of mind or emotion'.

The words 'tone' and 'mood' are often used interchangeably. However, the definitions above show that the mood of a poem or the overriding feeling it invokes is created *through* a writer's use of tone. Therefore, tone encompasses sound, word choices and the many other features of language that contribute to the writer's style.

When you are looking and listening for tone in a poem, pay close attention to the following aspects, which all make a contribution. The questions will help you analyse each aspect.

Looking and listening for tone

Voice

(also refer to the section on voice on pages 34–37)

- How does the speaker talk to you, the reader?
- Is the speaker speaking directly or are they recalling what someone else has said?
- Can you trust what you are hearing?
- Do you sympathise with the speaker?
- Do they make you feel uncomfortable?

Rhythm

(also refer to the sections on rhyme on pages 20–23 and rhythm on pages 23–26)

- What can you say about the rhythm of the lines? What impact do they have?
- Are there frequent pauses or end-stopped lines that break up the lines?
- Does the poet use enjambement so that the lines, images or arguments flow coherently together?
- How else does the punctuation seem to contribute to the rhythm and tone of the piece?

Diction

- What can you say about the words used (eg are they simple, ordinary, unusual, old-fashioned, hard to understand, official sounding, conversational, child-like, contemporary)?
- How do the words combine together? What impact do they have?

Sound

(also refer to the sections on rhyme on pages 20–23 and rhythm on pages 22–26)

- What can you say about the sounds of the words used? Listen to the consonants and vowels. Does the poet use assonance or alliteration in any way? Are there soft or hard sounds in the poem? Are there repetitions of sounds, words or phrases? Is the sound quickly over or are there moments when a sound lingers?
- Does the poem have a rhyme scheme? If so, what effect does this have on the tone?

Structure

(also refer to the section on form and structure on pages 8–20)

- How are the words laid out on the page?
- Is the poem arranged in stanzas? Do these indicate changes in tone?

Content

- What does the poem seem to be about? Are there things you seem to be told?
- Does the poet use imagery? How does this contribute to tone?
- Does the poem leave you with questions?
- How does it make you feel?

Once you have identified the tone a poet is using, you are well on your way to developing a clearer understanding of the piece as a whole. Tone can be very obvious or very elusive. Sometimes it will take you several readings to be clear about what you have heard. Hearing the poem read aloud by different people and reading the poem aloud yourself will help you to recognise how tone works in a poem.

Independent research

If you would like to hear a wide range of modern and contemporary poets reading their work aloud, go to www.poetryarchive.org

Activity 38

If possible, listen to the four poems in Activities 39 and 40 being read by their poets at www.poetryarchive.org. Refer to the word bank of tones in the box below and to the 'Looking and listening for tone' box on page 39 to help you describe the tone of each poem. (These tone words are only suggestions to help you. You can add other ideas of your own.)

desperate	bored	grieving	careworn	casual
sinister	sarcastic	triumphant	mysterious	confident
enigmatic	distracted	uncertain	resigned	puzzled
hopeful	proud	angry	smug	argumentative
passionate	defiant	nostalgic	satirical	bleak
happy	ironic	indifferent	optimistic	edgy
sad	conspiratorial			

Activity 39

- 1 Read the following poem by Owen Sheers, and if possible, listen to him reading it on www.poetryarchive.org.
- 2 What do you notice about the different tones he uses to convey his father's feelings first when visiting the fort with his son and then on returning years later to scatter someone's ashes?
- 3 How would you describe these tones?

The Hill Fort (Y Gaer)

On a clear day he'd bring him here,
his young son, charging the hill
as wild as the long-maned ponies

who'd watch a moment
before dropping their heads to graze again.
When he finally got him still

he'd crouch so their eyes were level,
one hand at the small of his back
the other tracing the horizon,

pointing out all the places lived in
by the fathers and sons before them:
Tretower, Raglan, Bredwardine ...

And what he meant by this but never said, was
'Look, Look over this land and see how long
the line is before you – how in these generations

we're no more than scattered grains;
that from here in this view, 1, 19 or 90 years
are much the same;

that it isn't the number of steps
that will matter,
but the depth of their impression.'

And that's why he's come back again,
to tip these ashes onto the tongue of the wind
and watch them spindrift into the night.

Not just to make the circle complete,
to heal or mend,
but because he knows these walls,

sunk however low,
still hold him in as well as out:
protect as much as they defend.

Owen Sheers

Activity 40

- 1 Now read the following three contrasting poems, again listening to the poets reading them on www.poetryarchive.org, if possible.

Haunts

Don't be afraid, old son, it's only me,
though not as I've appeared before,
on the battlements of your signature,
or margin of a book you can't throw out,
5 or darkened shop front where your face
first shocks itself into a mask of mine,
but here, alive, one Christmas long ago
when you were three, upstairs, asleep,
and haunting *me* because I conjured you
10 the way that child you were would cry out
waking in the dark, and when you spoke
in no child's voice but out of radio silence,
the hall clock ticking like a radar blip,
a bottle breaking faintly streets away,
15 you said, as I say now, *Don't be afraid.*

Michael Donaghy

George Square

My seventy seven year old father
Put his reading glasses on
To help my mother do the buttons
On the back of her dress.
5 'What a pair the two of us are!'
my mother said, 'Me with my sore wrist,
you with your bad eyes, your soft thumbs!'

And off they went, my two parents
To march against the war in Iraq,
10 Him with his plastic hips, her with her arthritis
To congregate at George Square where the banners
Waved at each other like old friends, flapping,
Where'd they'd met for so many marches over their years,
For peace on earth, for pity's sake, for peace, for peace.

Jackie Kay



Jean 'Binta' Breeze

earth cries

she doesn't cry for water
she runs rivers deep
she doesn't cry for food
she has suckled trees
5 she doesn't cry for clothing
she weaves all that she wears
she doesn't cry for shelter
she grows thatch everywhere
she doesn't cry for children
10 she's got more than she can bear
she doesn't cry for heaven
she knows it's always there
you don't know why she's crying
when she's got everything
15 how could you know she's crying
for just one humane being

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

- 2 'Haunts' also features a father (perhaps two fathers).
- Write a sentence to describe the tone of the poem.
 - Write a short paragraph, comparing the tone of 'Haunts' with that of 'The Hill Fort (Y Gaer)'.
- 3 In 'George Square' Jackie Kay focuses on both a father and a mother.
- Write a sentence to describe the tone.
 - Write a short paragraph, explaining how you think the poem's narrator feels about her parents and the march they are going to participate in. Comment on how the tone helps you to arrive at your views.

- 4 'Earth Cries' is very different in subject matter and tone from the other three poems. Write a short paragraph to describe it. Make sure you explore the effectiveness of the poet's use of patterns and repetition in the poem as a whole.

If a poem includes speech, or a number of different voices, this can help with identification of tone. For example, Philip Larkin's 'Mr Bleaney' contains contrasting tones, which contribute to the overriding mood of the poem.

Activity 41

- 1 Read Philip Larkin's poem, upper right, and, if possible, listen to him reading it at www.poetryarchive.org.
- 2 Now read this possible response to the different tones (underlined), bottom right, that might be detected in the poem. Do you agree with these points of view or do you have a different interpretation?
- 3 Now look again at the words in the poem. On a copy and using different colours, highlight the parts that indicate contrasting tones.
 - a Why do you think Larkin has included the landlady's words?
 - b How do you think they contrast with the rest of the poem?
- 4 How else does Larkin appear to use language to show what the narrator thinks of the landlady and of his new situation?
- 5 What do you think the mood of the poem is? How does the language contribute to this?
- 6 Look at the sample response again. What essential elements are missing? Write your own commentary about the tone and mood of the poem, ensuring that you refer to evidence to support your ideas.
- 7 Share your commentary and discuss your ideas with a partner or the rest of your group.

Mr Bleaney

'This was Mr Bleaney's room. He stayed
The whole time he was at the Bodies, till
They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows a strip of building land.
Tussocky, littered. 'Mr Bleaney took
My bit of garden properly in hand.'
Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags –
'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
On the same saucer-souvenir, and try

Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
The jabbering set he egged her on to buy.
I know his habits – what time he came down,
His preference for sauce to gravy, why

He kept on plugging at the four aways –
Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk
Who put him up for summer holidays,
And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That how we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

Philip Larkin

You can hear the optimistic landlady, who is keen to rent out Mr Bleaney's old room and tell her visitor about how well he fitted into her establishment. However, the cynical narrator first casts his eye around his new lodgings, conveying his irritation for the ingratiating landlady. Then, there is a change in tone as he finds himself almost resigned to a solitary, grim life and questions if Mr Bleaney felt this way too.

Activity 42

For one final look at tone and mood in poetry, it is helpful to turn to the work of two other poets who both demonstrate real mastery of these elements: Thomas Hardy and Carol Ann Duffy.

- 1 Read the poems once and then reread them, preferably aloud to someone else.

Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
– They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles solved years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro –
On which lost the more by our love.

10 The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing ...

15 Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Thomas Hardy

Mean Time

The clocks slid back an hour
and stole light from my life
as I walked through the wrong part of town,
mourning our love.

5 And, of course, unmendable rain
fell to the bleak streets
where I felt my heart gnaw
at all our mistakes.

10 If the darkening sky could lift
more than one hour from this day
there are words I would never have said
nor have heard you say.

15 But we will be dead, as we know,
beyond all light.

These are the shortened days
and the endless nights.

Carol Ann Duffy

- 2 Jot down your initial impressions of the tone and mood of each poem. How would you describe each poem?
- 3 Now imagine you have a card of paint colours in front of you and an mp3 player.
 - a Which broad colour group might you pick for each poem? Why?
 - b What broad type of music might you pick to reflect the mood of each poem? Why?
- 4 What do the poems have in common in terms of tone and mood? Write notes in answer to each of the questions below. You could also refer to the 'Looking and listening for tone' box on page 39 for further ideas.
 - a How do Hardy and Duffy use the settings in their poems (the pond in a winter landscape and the wet streets on the wrong side of town) to contribute to tone and mood?
 - b Both poems are written in stanzas. How do these structures, the rhythms and other patterns within each poem create a pervading atmosphere or mood? What impact do the poets' word choices have on us?
- 5 Now look again at your initial impressions. Listen to the poems again inside your head. Can you be more precise about the distinctive tones of each poem? What do the tones created by the poets contribute to the overall moods in each poem?
 - a What specific shade would you choose within the broad colour group? Are there subtle differences in tone or nuances you hadn't noticed before? Is, for example, one poem vermillion and the other scarlet? Is one azure and the other turquoise?
 - b What specific piece of music would you choose for each? How have you arrived at these choices?
- 6 What do the tones created by the poets contribute to the overall moods in each poem? Write a comparison of the tone and mood of the two poems. Remember to use evidence from the poems to support each of your points and follow this with further analysis or exploration.

Preparing for the exam

For your poems, think about how the following features help to create a particular tone:

- voice
- rhythm
- diction
- sound
- structure
- content.

How does the tone created contribute to the overall mood of the poem?

In conclusion

Throughout the 'Exploring poetry' section you have explored the different choices poets make when they write poetry and the effects these choices can have both on the poems they create and on the readers, performers or listeners who engage with them.

Return to the Poetry experiences grid you completed in Activity 3. Reflect on your progress with a partner or your teacher. Which aspects do you feel more confident about now? Which do you feel are your current areas of strength? Which areas do you think you need further work on?

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