

### Activity: Reading processes

When developing a response about reading practices it is important to discuss the process of reading. Below is a list of sentence starters which provide examples of this. Add SIX more sentences starters to this list in preparation for your exam.

- Readers that share the text's feminist outlook are likely to...
- A reader opposed to the dominant ... discourse in this text would develop a resistant reading...
- My own value of ... allows for this text to be understood as...
- Considering the structure of this text rather than the content, one could infer that this text represents...
- If read from a Marxist perspective, the text can be seen as representing...
- This metaphor could be understood by readers focusing on eco-critical theory as...
- The use of this archetype could be seen by a reader as...
- Focusing on the sub-generic construction of the text would see this text as...
- Familiarity with archetypal representations of masculinity may mean readers would see this text as representing...
- A reader familiar with the Civil Rights Movement may infer...
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### Considering Question 9

Explain how the construction of imagery has enriched your understanding of a human experience. In your response, make primary reference to at least one poetry text.

#### Interpreting the question

This question asks candidates to consider how the experience of reading a poetic text rich in imagery has enriched their understanding of an element of the human experience. The command term 'explain' requires candidates to *relate cause and effect; make the relationships between things evident; provide why and/or how*, which encourages responses that articulate and describe elements of textual construction, thus inviting a close discussion of language techniques. 'Enriched' is an important term in this question and candidates should consider how the construction of their studied poem/s has deepened, furthered, developed or expanded on their understanding and should seek to interrogate this term closely. For example, candidates could discuss how reading Carol Ann Duffy's 'Warming her Pearls' enriches their understanding of the human experience of forbidden love or how Dylan Thomas' poetry can be read to further our perception of the process of finding one's identity and sense of self.

'Imagery' in this question can refer to the evocation of senses. Sensory imagery can include visual imagery, olfactory imagery, auditory imagery, tactile imagery, gustatory imagery and techniques which appeal to the sensory experience. A discussion of synesthesia and the interplay between senses could also make for interesting discussion.

The term 'construction' asks for discussion of how imagery is developed through language and generic techniques; clear analysis of how devices create imagery would make for a successful response. Candidates should reflect on the idea that imagery is developed through the manipulation of many language features in combination, such as figurative language, sounds and metre, amongst many other devices. Stronger responses may offer a discussion of a range of sensory imagery rather than focusing on just one of the senses. For example, Robert Frost's 'After Apple-Picking' uses language techniques to construct visual, olfactory, tactile and auditory imagery to reflect upon the human experience of a wearying day's work followed by unsettling restlessness.

A 'human experience' is a phrase which could refer to aspects of life such as childhood, grief, the desire for change, a sense of personal stagnation or something more specific, such as the first day of school or any other experience linked to the human condition. The phrase 'human experience' is a broad idea and can be approached and defined in a number of ways. It is vital that responses connect the imagery within the poetic text to the enriched understanding of the human experience presented in the thesis.

The term 'your' invites a personal response and use of the pronoun 'I'. An articulation of your understanding prior to reading the poem, followed by a discussion of how the development of imagery in the poem has deepened your understanding of the human experience is a possible approach.

Given this is a genre-specific question, it should be clear throughout the response that poetry is the subject matter. Consideration of the imagery-rich and dense nature of poetic texts should

be incorporated. Further to this, a focus on the unique conventions of poetry is paramount; consider discussing concepts such as persona, tone, mood, movement, structure, rhythm, sound, prosody, enjambment, caesura and so on.

### Advice from teachers

- If your selected poems are relatively short, write about more than one text.
- Ensure you discuss a range of poetic elements, consider sound and structural devise as well as the more familiar aspects of language.
- Consider the context of your selected quotes in the original text. When discussed out of context to make a point you can lose connection with the tone, mood and purpose of the text.

### Activity: A cup of tea

Write a poem about drinking a cup of tea. You must use visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile and gustatory imagery. Use a range of techniques to construct your imagery, such as simile, alliteration and caesura.

Alternatively, write about one of the following activities or experiences, but remember to still utilise a broad range of imagery and appeal to many senses:

- waking up too early
- selecting cereal in the supermarket
- visiting a familiar location after a long time
- wrapping a gift
- searching for a lost item
- digging a hole
- making a decision
- fixing something that is broken
- swimming in cold water
- running late for school
- studying for a test
- eating your favourite food
- visiting your favourite place.

### Question 9: Sample response one

This response adeptly discusses sound and structure, which are important elements to consider when approaching generic-specific questions about poetry. The comparison of the companion poems is an effective approach and provides an appropriate avenue for detailed discussion. The exploration of the human experience which involves coming to terms with questions pertaining to origin and existence makes for an interesting thesis and the candidate attempts to engage with the question on a personal level, which is to be commended. The discussion of the imagery within the poems could be enhanced by more precise metalanguage and consideration of the sensory contrasts between these two texts. This candidate effectively signposts their argument with key words from the question; however, the construction of imagery could have been more directly addressed within the body of their argument.

"To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wildflower. To hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour." This quote by artist and poet William Blake summarises the innate desire of humanity to comprehend the vastness of philosophical thinking. At the heart of this desire, experienced by Blake and continuing today, is the exploration of the idea of human origin and the existence of a divine creator. In his poems 'The Lamb', from Songs of Innocence published in 1789, and 'The Tiger', from Songs of Experience published in 1794, he explores the idea of a divine creator's character as both gentle and powerful through the construction of contrasting imagery. The duality of these poems when considered together enriched my understanding of the desire and limitation of the human mind in comprehending its own existence.

When considering the origin of human existence Blake concluded that we were made by a loving God, a conclusion from which we can experience joy and security. The experience is characterised in his poem 'The Lamb' written in two stanzas with five couplets and in an AABB rhyme scheme, the simplistic structure creates an amiable tone similar to that of a nursery rhyme. This is continued through the use of soft consonants "l" "s" and vowel "i" in the heavenly imagery of "soft" "stream" and "bright". The repetition of the line "Little Lamb I'll tell thee" also creates the image of an excitable child speaking. Blake also uses images of a "lamb" and a "child", both with strong

This quote provides an interesting frame for the candidate's approach to the 'human experience' element of the question.

This introduction is dense and concise and makes for an efficient approach to opening a response.

It would have been useful for the candidate to discuss their understanding of this concept prior to reading this poetry.

The discussion of rhyme and structure demonstrates an understanding of how poetry functions as one of the literary genres. This argument could have been furthered by an overt discussion of the auditory imagery created through this element of construction.

The term 'refrain' would have been a more precise use of metalanguage here.

connotations of innocence and fragility. These images when considered with the line "we are called by his name" suggests that the one who created us resembles the same quality of the "tender" and fragile. Biblical allusion of a "Lamb" and of the spiritual and historical figure of Jesus coming down to earth as a human in the line "he humbled himself to become a little child" creates an image of closeness and intimacy. This shows that the divine creator Blake is depicting is one that is approachable and gentle. Blake's use of heavenly imagery and tone of childlike wonder throughout the poem creates the same sense of warm security within the reader as experienced by the persona. This revealed to me a deeper understanding of the safety and sense of belonging that can be found when one believes in a caring, compassionate creator, in the midst of questioning and confusion when considering the challenging questions of human origin.

William Blake continued his exploration of the ideas of a divine creator and human origin in his poem 'The Tyger'. Written in trochaic tetrameter, the harsh alliterative patterns in "Tyger, Tyger burning bright" creates an image of a tiger being forged out of the beating of a blacksmith's hammer, a stark contrast to the "tender" creation of "The Lamb". The mechanical imagery of "hammer" and "chain" as well the hellish imagery of a "fire" and "burning" constructs a tone of power again contrasting "The Lamb". The persona reinforces this power by asking "what distant deeps of skies/ burnt the fire from thine eyes?", where could such a fearsome creature come from? Blake suggests the answer in the last line of the fifth stanza and links the two poems together by writing "and he who made the Lamb made thee?" This central question resonated with me as I had often questioned whether the divine creator could be the god of innocence and the "Lamb" as well as experience and the "Tyger". This question was again partially answered by Blake in the final line of the poem, "what immortal hand or eye could frame they fearful symmetry?" This breaks away from the rhyme scheme which leaves the reader with a sense of discomfort. I liken this jarring lack of finality to

A more specific discussion of imagery would benefit the line of argument taken here.

There is some overuse of the word 'this' to begin sentences in this part of the response. Variation in syntax would be helpful to build the fluency of written expression.

There is a strong link back to the 'human experience' element of the question here.

A confident discussion of metre and sound is provided here.

A discussion of how harsh auditory and visual imagery is built using the choice of metre and alliterative sound would have been interesting here.

The term 'resonated' works well to frame the candidate's personal response, as the term 'resonances' appears in the Literature syllabus.

the limitations of the human mind in comprehending its own origin. Again, through the use of imagery and tone Blake explores the ideas of a divine creator that deepens his conclusion of its character to be both comforting as well as powerful. This exploration also expanded my understanding of the human mind's exploration of complex ideas as one that cannot be infinite or complete.

venerated by modern society, William Blake's body of works is characterised by its original use of literary devices as well as its boldness in exploring challenging themes. Both poems 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' depict the character of the divine creator as gentle as well as powerful. Blake's construction of contrasting imagery enables a glimpse of what the divine creator could be like. This exploration characterises both the limitations of the human mind as well as the desire to comprehend human origin. This enriched understanding highlighted to me the complexity of the human experience of philosophical thinking.

Further reference to imagery is needed in this part of the response.

The candidate ends their response with a confident turn of phrase and a strong reconnection with the human experience element of the question.



## Question 9: Sample response two

This is an eloquently expressed response to the question which shows thoughtful engagement with the poems studied. The poems discussed, along with the evidence selected, show a good understanding that imagery appeals to the senses of the reader. At times, there could be further discussion and analysis of the imagery that is presented, identifying the language and figurative devices which contribute to the construction of imagery. The human experiences identified by the candidate make for an interesting discussion and allow for a nuanced response to the question. The candidate is successful in stating their understanding of the human experience of loss prior to reading the poems and reflecting on how their perception was enriched due to the sensory power of the texts.

Poetry is renowned for the effectiveness with which it is able to employ the senses in evoking a not only aesthetically pleasing, but also intellectually valuable, response in the reader. Seamus Heaney's poetry is no different. Heaney's poems 'Blackberry Picking' (1966) and 'Funeral Rites' (1975) feature purposeful construction of sensory imagery and use of figurative language in order to represent the human experience of loss in complex ways. As someone who has never experienced true grief or the loss of a family member, but who has still had a chance to come to terms with human mortality, these poems provide me with an interesting insight into the way in which such a realisation of human impermanence can occur in much more forceful and explicit ways, enriching my understanding of this experience.

While not dealing with grief in the sense of loss of human life, 'Blackberry Picking' still employs vivid imagery to explore a turning point in the speaker's understanding of the impermanence of everything and their struggling to come to terms with such a fact. The construction of imagery which utilises all the senses is particularly effective in conveying the all-consuming nature of childhood emotions and the pain that is therefore experienced in the face of this loss. The poem describes young children picking blackberries and interweaves descriptions of the berries' "flesh" as "sweet like thickened wine; summer's blood was in it", as well as descriptions of their "glossy" appearance and the way in which they "burn like eyes" looking at the children from their pail. Not only does the poem utilise

The opening line references concepts from the Literature syllabus and reflects an understanding of how literature is created for both aesthetic and ideological functions.

This introduction provides an eloquent description of the candidate's understanding of this experience and also the enrichment that came from reading poetry.

The human experience of grief and loss is a fitting choice of subject matter for this question.

The evidence in this paragraph is interwoven in a cohesive and articulate manner which works to successfully capture the imagery and mood within the poem itself.

all the senses, it further makes use of repeated imagery of the human body to ultimately construct the children's blackberry picking as laced with guilt at their greed and "lust" in "hoarding" excessive quantities of berries in their "byre". In this way, imagery allows for a more complex representation of children coming to terms with the loss of their "stash"- which ultimately comes to "smell of rot" as it is covered in a "rat-grey fur". Not only are the children confronted with the impermanence of their berries which each year they "hope will keep" but "know [they] will not", they must come to terms with this reality while simultaneously dealing with their feelings of guilt and shame. As someone who is not religious, the introduction of religious allusion coupled with vivid, grotesque imagery in lines such as "summer's blood" (connoting the blood of Christ) enriched my appreciation of the ways in which religion and religious guilt mediates the human experience of and acceptance of mortality.

The poem 'Funeral Rites' deals more explicitly with grief, using imagery to evoke the experience of letting go of a loved one and thereby encouraging a collective moving on from the past trauma in Northern Ireland. Written during the Troubles, the poem initially presents a vision of the "customary rhythms" of grieving practices in Irish communities before the onset of mass loss of human life and a subsequent loss of humanity. The poem constructs imagery of the coffins being "released" physically and mentally from their loved ones through use of metaphor in "black glacier of each funeral pushed away". Descriptions of black shiny surfaces evokes imagery of coffins, while reference to the natural "black glacier" works to suggest a peaceful passing on- for the deceased and for their family members. Despite the construction of some unsettling personification of the "wave drip[ping] down to vein the candles" and images of "women hovering" behind the speaker; the scene is ultimately a peaceful one. The corpses' hands are described as "unwrinkled" and "dough-white", further suggesting softness and peacefulness. The use of imagery in this way works to construct a nuanced representation of Irish customs

There is some wonderful sensory imagery brought up for discussion here, although closer analysis of some of the examples could be provided.

This paragraph deals with the human experience facet of the question in a successful manner. It is clear which element of the human experience is being discussed and how reading this poem furthered the candidate's understanding.

of grieving before the Troubles, while simultaneously presenting the potential for peace and beauty in coming to terms with loss of life more broadly – an idea I had previously not considered. This therefore, deeply enriched my understanding of the process through which individuals are able to comes to terms with and subsequently let go of the pain of grief, while engaging me in a vivid representation of human loss.

‘Funeral Rites’ and ‘Blackberry Picking’ both deal with young people confronting loss, mortality and the impermanence of everything, albeit in differing ways. The use of vivid and aesthetically pleasing imagery in both poems is constructed through connotative language, metaphor and personification, and was ultimately valuable in deepening my understanding of the complex, troubling experience of a coming-of-age realisation of impermanence, while also expanding my appreciation of the role of funerals in allowing for the processing of grief.

The point made about the vivid imagery of loss helping to enrich the candidate’s understanding of that same experience is vital to the premise of this question.

The clear articulation of how imagery was constructed in the poems using connotative language, metaphor and personification makes for a strong finish.

Activity: Sensory reflection

Being able to identify imagery is integral; however, it is important to articulate the effect of such imagery on the reader. Using a poem you have studied, fill in the following chart in order to both identify and describe the use of imagery. If all forms of imagery are not present in your selected poetic text, focus on those that can be identified.

Type of imagery	Example: <i>'Homo Suburbensis'</i> by Donald Bruce Dawe	Effect
olfactory	<i>'Where the easement runs along the back fence and the air/ smells of tomato-vines'</i>  <i>'Smelling the smoke of somebody's rubbish'</i>	The juxtaposing olfactory imagery of the fresh and invigorating smell of the tomato vines with the acrid stench of burning rubbish works to immerse the reader in the small wonders found in natural spaces (even a suburban backyard) gradually being eroded.
tactile		
visual		
auditory		
gustatory		