

Unseen Poetry

Understanding the unseen poem

- Step 1: look at the question and circle the command word of the question
- Step 2: look at the title (is it polysemous - more than one meaning like 'Exposure'?)
- Step 3: read the poem 2-3 times

TOP TIP



- Remember... the poem **will** have more than one interpretation. There will be a surface meaning and a more abstract/ metaphorical meaning.

This is deliberate: the poem has to be accessible, but also give top-grade students the scope to answer insightfully.

Finding the 'hidden' message of the poem

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the poem's message?
- What idea is the poet trying to communicate through the poem?
- Is there a recurring symbol or extended metaphor?
- Is there more than one way the poem could be interpreted?

If the poem is about a concrete (tangible/ physical) item e.g. last year's was 'Scaffolding,' then it is **HIGHLY** unlikely that a poet has chosen to write about something so mundane.

Accessing the top marks

As mentioned in my poetry comparison video, always be asking **why** a poet has done something – nothing is in a poem by accident. Every word/ piece of punctuation is there with a function – it's your job to talk about that.

- If you're struggling to know if you've explained why, use the word 'as' or 'because'
- Example: the writer shows he is sad **BECAUSE...**
- Example: the writer shows he is sad **AS...**

Other top tips:

- Offer alternate interpretations
- From the previous point, find the hidden message of the poem.
- Look for extended metaphors, semantic fields, a volta or a cyclical structure – this will impress the examiner as you're able to look beyond just simple language techniques

How to talk about the writers intentions with unseen poetry

- Tentative verbs are your friend here: **may, might, could, perhaps**
- **Consider their wider message with the poem**
- **Consider why they have selected certain words** – what impact are they hoping to have on readers?

What to avoid

- Do not just explain what the poem is about
- No context (AO3) is needed for this question – *if* you happen to get given a poem by a poet you know, you could put in something relevant linked to AO1/ 2, but there are no actual marks for this.

TOP TIP



The exam board understands that the poem is unseen and there is a lot of scope for interpretation. Students are generally rewarded highly for this question, so don't overlook this question as an opportunity to get marks as I think it's marked pretty leniently. SO many students leave the unseen poetry and it's a very easy way to pick up a few marks.