



A-Level English Literature
Revision notes
2020/2021

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Unseen Poetry - A Single Poem

Diction

Cultural and Social Context

Does the diction give you clues as to when the poem was written?

Does the language seem **traditional, modern, formal, colloquial**?

Has the poet used **slang**? Why? What would be lost if this slang was replaced with **formal language**?

What does the use of language tell you about when the poem was written? Does the poet use phrases which are not used in modern times?

Are there words that are specific to a certain **culture, age group** or **gender**? Why have these words been used? Is the poem focusing specifically on a particular **social group**?

Dialect

Is the entire poem written in dialect?

What effect does the dialect create and what would be lost if the poem didn't use dialect?

Are only certain words written in dialect? If so, why? Are memories attached with the words?

Does the **slang** or dialect date the poem?

Is the dialect vital in conveying the **cultural context** of the poem?

Has the poet only used dialect in speech and only for certain characters?

Use of language-tense

Which tenses does the poet use?

If the poem is written entirely in the past tense then is the poet simply reflecting on what has happened? Or does the poet finish in the present tense, thus suggesting that what has happened in the past relates to the present?

If so, is the poet creating an environment for the reader/listener to imagine? How successful is this?

Has the poet use the conditional tense? Is the poet exploring possibilities, or imagining? Is there a sense of persuasion in the poem?

Use of imagery

General Questions

What images has the poet used?

Why has the poet used these images?

What effect do the images have on the reader?

Mood of the Imagery

How do the images link with the mood, tone and ideas of the poem?

What mood do the images create? Does this contrast with the rest of the poem?

Does the poet focus on movement, feeling, sound, taste or appearance in the images?

Which senses is the image trying to appeal to?

Number of Images and Extended Metaphors

Has the poet focused on only one image or used a range of images? What effect does this create?

Has the poet taken one image taken one image and developed it through the poem?

Cultural importance of the image

What does the poet's choice of image tell you about his/her cultural/ historical background?

Do the images have a religious background?

Symbolism

Are the images meant to **symbolise** or **represent** something else?

Is there a **theme** linking the images used in the poem?

Does this add to your understanding of the poem?

Is the poet trying to appeal to the taste, touch, smell, sight or hearing of the reader? Perhaps the poet focuses on just one of the senses? What sensation does this create?

Form and Structure

Form

Ballad: The ballad is a traditional form of poetry, which now takes many forms. The ballad develops a dramatic story.

Elegy: The elegy is a poem written to mourn the death of a person.

Lyric: A lyric or lyrical poem is a short poem which explores or expresses a state of feeling rather than narrate an event.

Narrative: Narrative poetry is a poem where the poet describes an event or series of events.

Ode: The ode is like the lyrical poem but more detailed and more complex. It explores an idea, **political, philosophical, intellectual** or **personal** in detail.

Rap: A modern style of poetry often associated with heavy use of rhyme, word play and a strong rhythm.

Shape Poem: A poem written in the shape of a particular object.

Sonnet: There are two forms of sonnet; **Petrarchan** and **Shakespearian**.

Use of stanzas

If a poem consists of a series of quatrains but finishes with a couplet you should question why? What effect does the short couplet have set against the quatrains?

If the number of lines in each stanza varies what does that tell you about the content of each stanzas? Are short stanzas less important or more focused?

Why has the poet divided the poem into different stanzas? What is contained in each stanza?

What occurs between stanzas? Do the poet's ideas seem to jump?

Are the stanzas arranged chronologically?

Is an image developed in each stanza?

Line Length and Pace

Are all the lines of equal length?

If not, then which lines stand out, either as being long or short?

Does the poet draw attention to certain words because of the layout of the lines?

What effect does the line length have on the way you read the poem? If the poem is entirely made of short lines then do you read the poem quickly?

Has the poet put a single word or phrase on a separate line? Why? What does this suggest to the reader?

Rhyme

Rhyme-Key Questions

Does the poet use rhyme? Why? Why not?

What effect does this use/absence of rhyme have?

Types of Rhyme

Alliteration is the repetition of first letters/ sounds in words in order to create an effect, for example: "slow soft touch of spring".

- Is alliteration used in place of or in addition to rhyme?
- What effect does this have to the way the poem sounds?
- Which words are used in alliteration?
- **Assonance** is the repetition of a particular vowel sounds in words close to each other.
- **Consonance** is the repetition of a particular consonant sound in words close to each other.
- **For poems containing alliteration, assonance or consonance, consider the following:**
- Whether the sounds are hard or soft, long or short.
- How does this link with the meaning of the words or mood of the poem?
- Does the poet emphasise particular sounds to create a certain effect?

Half Rhyme is when part of two or more words rhyme. For example meter and weather or cash and Kosh.

Full Rhyme is when all of the word rhymes. For example meter and heater or cash and flash.

Rhyme Scheme

Is rhyme used simply to attract the attention of the listener or does the poet want to draw attention to specific words?

Which words rhyme?

Has the poet chosen key words to rhyme thus drawing attention to the words? Or does he/she put rhyme in the middle of a sentence so that its purpose is to make the poem flow?

Are there lines which rhyme alongside those which don't? Why? Is there an irregular rhyme scheme?

How does the rhyme scheme influence the way the poem is read?

Make sure that you do this whenever writing about rhyme: **NEVER** just say what the rhyme scheme is - **ALWAYS** explain how it works and its effect.

Rhythm

Blank Verse

The **Blank Verse** form of poetry is most famously associated with the writing of Shakespeare. It uses an **iambic pentameter** but does not use rhyme.

Syllabic Verse

Lines in **syllabic** verse follow a strict syllable pattern. When you read a poem, count the number of syllables in each line. Do you notice a pattern? What effect does this create?

Free Verse

Free Verse is a modern form of poetry where there are no rules regarding the structure or syllable count of the poems.

Rhyming Couplets

A **couplet** is a pair of lines. A **rhyming couplet** is a pair of lines which rhyme.

Sometimes poets use a couplet to **conclude a poem** or to **stand out from the rest of the poem**.

Often rhyming couplets will be **lines of equal length to add to the sense of rhythm**.

Irregularities in line length

Has the poet used a longer or shorter line and break in the rhythm in order to draw attention to that line?

Use of repetition

Why is that phrase being repeated?

How does it relate to the overall theme of the poem?

Is the phrase changed in anyway?

Is the phrase a question or memory?

Does the repetition contribute to the rhythm?

Line Length and Pace

Are all the lines of equal length?

If not, then which lines stand out, either as being long or short?

Does the poet draw attention to certain words because of the layout of the lines?

What effect does the line length have on the way you read the poem? If the poem is entirely made of short lines then do you read the poem quickly?

Has the poet put a single word or phrase on a separate line? Why? What does this suggest to the reader?

General Questions

How is rhythm used to create a sense of energy, loss, pain, calm?

How does the rhythm of the poem reflect the mood or ideas of the poem?

Are specific sounds used, **onomatopoeia**?

Themes and Mood in the Poem

Useful Questions

Does a theme develop during the poem?

Does the poet present alternative viewpoints?

Does the poet's attitude appear to change during the poem?

Has a specific event or series of experiences influenced the attitudes of the poet or the character in the poem?

Is there a distinction between the viewpoint expressed by one character and that of the poet?

Is more than one theme expressed in the poem?

Is the poem reflective, aggressive, persuasive or descriptive?

What words and techniques are used to create the mood?

Does the mood of the poem appear to change?

How is the reader left feeling at the end of the poem?

Does the poem appear to answer its own question or does it leave the reader uncertain?

Unseen Poetry - a Comparison of Two Poems

How to Approach a Comparison Question

Why are you being asked to compare the two poems?

Are they being compared because of their styles, their contents or both?

Do you prefer one of the poems?

What are their different merits?

Are the poems from different times?

Does one of the poems appear more accessible at first, but have less depth?

Pastiche, Parody and Reply

Pastiche: A pastiche is where a writer attempts to imitate the style of a particular writer or period.

A parody is a humorous piece of writing. The writer mimics or exaggerates the style of another writer.

Parody: This can be done for a number of reasons: to expose the faults of another writer; purely for fun; or to give a fresh interpretation of a particular style or subject.

Reply: A reply is a clear response to another poem.

Rewrite: Sometimes a poet takes the subject matter of another and overtly rewrites the poem in a different style.

Points to Consider

Does the poet alter your interpretation of the other poem?

Does the reader gain anything from reading both poems?

Look for clear indications such as overt references to the other poem, such as reference to the poet or specific aspects of the poem.

Have the two poets have written about the same event, subject, and experience quite independently?

Was one poem written later than the other?

Are there clues to suggest that one of the poets has read the other?

Social and Cultural Context

Gender

Are the poems written by men or women?

If poets of the same gender write both poems, then do you notice different attitudes that suggest they are from different eras?

Do they represent the voice of their gender at different times?

If on the other hand poets of different genders write the poems, then do you notice ideas or attitudes that reflect the gender difference?

Do the two writers interpret and approach the same issue in different ways?

Does this have anything to do with whether they are male or female?

Social Context

When were the poems written?

Do they suggest ideas, which reflect a certain period of time?

If the poems are old, how do they relate to the modern reader?

Are the modern poems necessarily of more relevance to modern issues?

Can you see how attitudes have changed over a period of time?

Are there views that seem inappropriate nowadays, or alternatively do either of the poems have timeless qualities?

Have the poets used a certain style, which is associated with a certain era?

How does the style relate to the modern reader?

Do the poems represent ideas associated with a particular social background?

Do they represent views of similar or different social status? Is this relevant?

What language is used to highlight these social contexts?

Cultural Context

Which cultures are the two poems from?

If they are from the same cultural background, do they approach the same issue in different ways?

What language is used which suggests a particular cultural setting?

If the poems are from different cultures, in what ways are the style, subject matter, and attitudes influenced by this?

Although the poems are from different cultures, do they share the same ideas or values?

Why is it important to understand the poems' different cultural backgrounds?

What would ignoring this lose?

What is gained by considering the cultural context?

How does this help you appreciate the poem?

Poetic Voice

To what extent do issues of gender, and historical context, influence the poetic voice?

Why have each of the poems been written?

Have the poets approached a similar subject matter using contrasting poetic voices?

If the poets have used a similar poetic voice, why have they done so?

Do the poems demand to be read in very different ways and for different reasons?

Does one of the poems' poetic voices seem to be more effective?

Do the poems have different merits?

Diction

Does one of the poems seem more accessible because of the use of diction?

Is the reader necessarily able to access one of the poems more easily because of when the poem was written?

If the poets have used very different diction, what do you notice about the different effect?

Are there clear advantages and disadvantages for each type of diction?

Use of Imagery

What images do the poets use?

Have the poets used similar images but in different ways?

If the poets are writing about similar themes, how does their choice of imagery influence the reader's thoughts about the theme?

Sometimes poets write about the same subject but use completely different images. What does this tell you about their social and cultural context?

Does the choice of images in each poem complement each other or do they suggest different and opposing viewpoints?

Structure and Form of Poem

Similar Forms

Do the poets approach the same form in different ways and with different effects?

Have the poets used the form to portray different ideas? Do their ideas conflict with each other?

Has one of the poets used the form in a different and unusual way?

Different Forms

Why do you think each poet has chosen a particular form? What does that form offer the poet?

Do you notice different merits in the poems because of their different choice of form?

Does one of the poems lack something because of the choice of form?

Rhyme and Rhythm

Try reading them the poems at different paces and with different tones.

How does the use of rhyme and rhythm influence your reading of the poem?

Does the use of rhyme and rhythm link in with the time when the poems were written?

For example, does one poet use rap to discuss the same issue as another poet who has used blank verse?

What moods do the two poems create?

Do these arise as a result of the poets' use of rhyme and rhythm?

Is one of the poems more accessible because of its rhyme and rhythm?

Does one of the poets use a particular technique more effectively?

Themes and Moods in the Poem

Sometimes the link in themes isn't obvious at first.

Poems that are about the same theme may have very different moods and attitudes.

Think carefully about the social and cultural context.

How does this influence the poet's portrayal of a particular theme?

What words and techniques are used to create the moods in each poem?

Poetry - Open Text

Print out these notes and use them to remind you of what you have revised in this topic. In particular, memorising some of these questions should help you trigger ideas when in your exam.

Reading and Preparing your Anthology

Reading Individual Poems

It is important that you are familiar with the contents of the anthology.

Study a poem closely. Think about the following issues Poetic Voice Diction, Use of imagery, Structure and Form of Poem, Rhyme, Rhythm, Themes and Moods in the Poem.

Write key information on the poem. Consult your teacher to find out how much annotation is allowed.

Making Links between the Poems.

Can you see similarities between certain poets?

Do the different poets have particular styles or ideas that distinguish them from each other?

Are there certain themes that keep cropping up?

Which poems interest you the most and why?

Are there any you find difficult to understand?

Write down a list of categories that crop up in your comparisons.

Ask fellow students and teachers to see which themes and issues they think are important.

Types of Anthology

Anthologies by one poet.

Anthologies of a particular period.

Anthologies based on a certain theme.

These all share common approaches but have specific issues which you need to consider.

Considering the Style of Anthology

Anthologies by a Single Poet

Do you notice a common theme running throughout the poet's work?

Does there seem to be different and perhaps conflicting ideas?

Does it include poetry from a particular episode in the poet's life?

Does it include poetry from across a number of years?

If the poetry spans the poet's life, do you notice any similarities or differences between poems of different stages in his life?

How have the poems been arranged in the book?

Does this bear any relation to your own groupings of the poem?

Can you link up poems according to their themes, form and use of language?

Anthologies of a Particular Period

Study the poetry of more than one poet so that you establish an understanding of the range of styles

Choose at least two poets who have similarities and two who have differences so that you have both elements covered.

Consider enough poems by each author to be able to avoid making sweeping statements about a poet's work

based on a single poem.

Are there differences in style and approach for poems about the same theme as well as differences in ideas?

Do you notice any common links between the collection of poets?

Are there any features distinctive of the period such as a form-ballad or figurative technique-conceit?

Have you an understanding of the social and historical context of the poetry?

Remember that your research is meant to enhance your appreciation of the literature.

Anthologies Based on a Certain Theme

Some collections of poetry are based around a particular theme.

Break down the theme into categories.

How do the poets present a particular theme?

How do they show their differences in opinion?

What techniques do they use?

How does their choice of approach reflect their ideas?

Comparing the Poems

Background reading

It is helpful to use background texts and literary critics to stimulate your own ideas.

Always question why they have reached certain opinions.

Learning the odd short quotation from a critic will be rewarded if you are then able to comment on the

quotations in your own words

Find out when the criticism was published, does this reflect different attitudes?

Which poems should I prepare?

If you notice poems that can be compared for a range of aspects then it makes sense to focus on them.

Try to consider a variety of poems.

Don't restrict yourself to only one poet, one theme or one group of poems.

In your exam it is most likely that you will be asked to focus on two or three poems in detail, so it is important that you prepare your notes carefully.

Practice Questions

The best way to prepare for the exam is to try practice questions.

Simply writing comparative essays of different poems is useful.

In the exam you are likely to have to focus on just a certain aspect.

Writing essay plans is a good idea. It takes less time and helps you focus your reading.

Use the S-cool! past exam questions to help you.

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How does it relate to the overall theme of the poem?

Is the phrase changed in anyway?

Is the phrase a question or memory?

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Has the poet put a single word or phrase on a separate line? Why? What does this suggest to the reader?

General Questions

How is rhythm used to create a sense of energy, loss, pain, calm?

How does the rhythm of the poem reflect the mood or ideas of the poem?

Are specific sounds used, **onomatopoeia**?

Themes and Mood in the Poem

Useful Questions

Does a theme develop during the poem?

Does the poet present alternative viewpoints?

Does the poet's attitude appear to change during the poem?

Has a specific event or series of experiences influenced the attitudes of the poet or the character in the poem?

Is there a distinction between the viewpoint expressed by one character and that of the poet?

Is more than one theme expressed in the poem?

Is the poem reflective, aggressive, persuasive or descriptive?

What words and techniques are used to create the mood?

Does the mood of the poem appear to change?

How is the reader left feeling at the end of the poem?

Does the poem appear to answer its own question or does it leave the reader uncertain?

Unseen Drama

Print out these notes and use them to remind you of what you have revised in this topic. In particular, memorising some of these questions should help you trigger ideas when in your exam.

Setting and Social Context

Setting - General Points

Is the setting important or merely a vehicle for the scene?

If the playwright does give a scene a specific setting, what was his reason for doing so?

Does a particular setting create a certain environment?

Setting and symbolism

If an object is referred to explicitly in the text, does it represent something significant?

What does the object symbolise?

Is the object 'owned' by anyone in particular?

What value does the character holding the object place in it?

What does it tell you about the character?

Does the setting reflect or affect a character's mood?

That is to say if a character appears unhappy, is it because of where they are, or does the setting reinforce that sense of sadness?

Dialect and Diction

Do the words suggest that the characters come from a particular social class or culture?

Do they appear fashionable, intellectual or upper class?

Does the playwright give the characters a particular dialect?

Is this done merely to show where the play is set or does it tell you about the character?

Can you highlight specific examples of vocabulary to support your ideas?

How does the language used by the character influence your attitude towards either the character or the character's role in the scene?

There may be two characters from different backgrounds in the scene, how does this affect the way they interact with each other?

Does the playwright appear to be raising an issue about status, class or power?

Has the playwright set the play in a particular culture? Does the playwright use language and dialect to reflect this?

Do the words used have a particular value within this context?

What would be lost if different language was used, and there was Standard English dialect?

Does the playwright rely on stereotypes to develop the setting and social context?

Presentation of Characters

Role of Character

Is the character's primary role to develop the plot for other characters?

What is the function of the character in the scene?

What may the writer have intended?

Actions of Characters

In what context does the audience first see the character in this extract?

What are they doing?

What do the actions; mannerisms and behaviour of the characters tell you about them?

Do they act differently during the scene?

What does this tell you about their feelings, response to different characters?

Do their actions seem to contradict what they say, or suggest that there is something being hidden?

What do the Characters say?

What do they say about the events on stage?

What do they say **to** other characters?

What do they say **about** other characters?

Do they talk about a particular theme?

Do their ideas about a theme conflict with the ideas of others?

Do they appear to change their mind about a particular idea during the course of the scene?

Do they discuss issues differently with different characters?

Do they state their feelings explicitly, or do you have to work out their emotions from what they say?

Diction

Do the words chosen by the playwright create a certain rhythm or pace in the scene?

How and why does the playwright do this?

Social Status

Do the words suggest that the characters come from a particular social class or culture?

How does the playwright use vocabulary and appearance to reflect the characters social status?

Does this tell you anything about the character, or does it merely show the setting of the play?

Mood and Tone

Does their mood develop or change during the course of the extract?

Do the characters use particular words that help you to understand their mood?

Does the audience learn about a character's mood from the way another character talks about or to them?

Does another character comment on their mood?

Are their observations accurate? Why? Why not?

Does the way an actor delivers a line affect the audience's understanding of the line?

Is the mood of an individual character different from that of the others?

How does this affect the overall mood?

Response to other Characters

Does one character talk differently to different characters? Why?

How do the characters appear to feel about one another?

Does the behaviour directed towards particular characters create dramatic tension?

Are the characters aware of the feelings of another towards them?

Dramatic Function of a Character in a Scene

How does the audience's response to the character change or develop as result of this scene?

Do the events in the scene build on previous events in the play or alter preconceptions?

How are characters used to develop a theme or event within the scene?

Do minor characters serve only to provide information for the protagonists (main characters) or are they of importance in themselves?

Is the purpose of a character to bring out a different perspective of a certain character?

Development of Characters, Plot and Theme

Development of Character

Do the characters learn something about their own or each other's situation, past, or emotions?

Do the character's actions potentially alter their future?

Do their actions affect the emotions and lives of the other characters?

Development of Plot

Is there a climax in the scene?

Does the tension build during the scene or is the tension dissipated?

Does an event happen which alters the direction of the plot?

Development of Theme

Does a theme appear during the course of the extract?

Does a specific theme or idea develop?

Is the audience offered different perspectives on a development?

Audience Response

Does the audience's attitude towards a particular character change during the scene?

Do the audience have a clearer understanding of a character's intentions at the end of the scene?

Is the audience aware of something which the characters are not?

Use of Language and Mood

Does the mood of the scene change?

Does the tone of the characters change? Why?

Do the characters change the way they speak because of the situation, their emotions or the people they are talking to?

End of Extract

How does the extract end?

How has the setting and situation changed during the extract?

What do the characters and audience expect to happen next?

Has anything been resolved, or is a new piece of information suddenly apparent?

In what ways does the dramatist make use of suspense?

Effect of Extract on Audience

Audience Feelings and Attitudes

Do the audience feel the same about the characters or situation at the end of the scene as they did at the beginning?

What causes their change?

What is the key dramatic moment in the scene?

Do the audience appreciate the significance of the scene at the time?

Techniques Used to Influence the Audience

Do the characters speak directly to the audience, use asides, or speak to each other?

Is the audience being directly involved with the audience? How does the playwright build up the tension during the extract?

Are there problems with staging the scene?

Does the playwright use descriptive language to describe events that would be difficult to portray on the stage?

Does the playwright use certain characters simply to develop the plot, rather than being of great interest in themselves?

Use of Irony

How is irony used in the extract?

Does the author use covert, overt or dramatic irony?

Staging of the Extract

How is the extract staged?

At what time of day would you set the piece?

How is the stage and lighting used?

Shakespeare Extract

Print out these notes and use them to remind you of what you have revised in this topic. In particular, memorising some of these questions should help you trigger ideas when in your exam.

Preparing for the Exam

Read the play a number of times. This will help you consider the themes and issues relating to the play.

Write a brief outline for each scene and each act.

It is important to know where a scene fits in relation to the play as a whole.

Once you have a firm grip of the order of events you can then explore the character, themes and issues.

An idea is to jot down the headings of themes and issues for each play.

Presentation of Characters

Dramatic function of the Character

How does the audience's response to the character change or develop as result of this scene?

Do the events in the scene build on previous events in the play or alter preconceptions?

What do the audience learn about the character specifically in this scene?

What is the function of the character in the scene?

What might Shakespeare have intended?

Always show an awareness of the writer.

Effect of an extract on the Audience

In what way do the audience's feelings and attitudes develop during the course of the extract?

Do the audience feel the same about the characters or situation at the end of the scene as they did at the beginning? What causes their change?

What is the key dramatic moment in the scene?

Do the audience appreciate the significance of the scene at the time?

Which techniques are used to influence the audience?

Do the characters speak directly to the audience, use asides, or speak to each other?

How does Shakespeare build up the tension during the extract?

Are there problems with staging the scene?

Is it easier to overcome them within the modern theatre?

Does Shakespeare use descriptive language to describe events that would be difficult to portray on the stage?

Does Shakespeare use irony? If so how is it used?

Does a character do something which the audience later realises is ironic?

Importance of the Extract in the Play as Whole

General Questions

What significance does the opening line of a speech have to what has happened before?

How does the direction of the play change during the course of the extract?

What questions are answered in this extract?

How are these questions answered?

Does the audience's attitude change during the extract?

In what way are there parallels between this scene and what has happened earlier or will take place later in the play?

Does Shakespeare develop an image or idea that he has used before or is this the scene where he introduces a key idea? How does this work on stage?

Why do you think this scene has been chosen by the examiner?

In what way is this scene significant?

Use of Language

General Questions

What images has Shakespeare used and why?

Simile, metaphor, conceit, symbol, symbolism, figurative language, extended metaphor.

What effect do the images have on the audience?

Do they help create a better understanding of the character?

What mood do they create?

Does this image represent the emotions and thoughts of the characters?

Are they used to help create the scene?

Does Shakespeare appeal to the five senses to create this setting?

Perhaps he focuses on only one sense?

What effect does this create?

Images and Extended Metaphors

Has Shakespeare focused on only one image or used a range of images? What effect does this create?

Does Shakespeare take one image and develop it through the course of the extract?

Does Shakespeare use word play or change the meaning and interpretation of the word?

How many characters are involved in creating this imagery?

Do they build on each other's ideas or provide a conflicting interpretation of the image?

Is the description of the image used to represent the relationship between the two characters?

Does the image link in with or build on the overall themes of the play?

Does the image represent the thoughts of one character, or the status of the whole play at that particular point?

Emma (1816) was the last of Austen's mature novels published in her lifetime. This shows in its artful **structure** and use of **irony**.

Offers a new kind of **realism** compared with popular fantasy romances - the social situations are familiar and believable.

Can be viewed as a **detective** novel. The plot is like the riddles Harriet Smith collects - the answer is courtship, but both the reader and the characters have to figure out who will marry whom.

Can also be seen as a novel about **education** and **personal growth**. Over the course of **one year**, through certain **key scenes**, Emma learns from her mistakes in judging others and herself.

Emma

- | | |
|--|---|
| ✓ A leader | ✗ Spoilt and bossy |
| ✓ Pretty and clever | ✗ Vain |
| ✓ Gives to the poor | ✗ Let's her imagination run away with her |
| ✓ Learns from her mistakes | ✗ Snobbish |
| ✓ Kind and patient with father and nephews | |

Mr. Knightley

- | | |
|---|--|
| ✓ Frank, honest and open | ✗ Rather serious and unflattering |
| ✓ Kind. Judges people wisely and accurately | ✗ Behaves like an older man - rarely dances, likes working alone at home |

Frank Churchill

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| ✓ Warm, sociable and fun | ✗ Dishonest in concealing his engagement |
|--------------------------|--|

✓ Genuinely sorry for the hurt he causes

✗ A flirt, who plays potentially hurtful games.

✗ Weak

Jane Fairfax

✓ Talented musician, well-educated and polite

✗ Painfully reserved and unwilling to open up to people.

✗ Conceals her engagement

Harriet Smith

✓ Sweet, simple and tender-hearted.

✗ Silly and easily-led

✓ Forgives easily, and can be influenced in a positive way

✗ Falls in love at the drop of hat

Robert Martin

✓ Responsible and successful

✗ Ugly

✓ Manly, sincere and constant in love

✗ Comes from a fairly low social rank (a negative quality in the Highbury world)

Mr Elton

✓ Popular, attractive and sociable

✗ Sentimental, proud, and after money

Areas of Study

Reason versus Imagination

Social Class and Status

Riddles and Games

Letters and Language

Openness versus Concealment

The Position of Women

Sample Questions

How does Frank Churchill's arrival change the social world of Highbury?

'Emma demonstrates that there is always more than one way of reading people and what they say.' Comment on the importance of reading and misreading in the novel.

Frankenstein

Ways of seeing

It is a horror story in which an alien creature takes his revenge on the human race. It is also a romantic's protest against the omnipotence of science and a far-sighted worry on the perils of a one-sided progress. As its subtitle - The Modern Prometheus - implies it may be seen as re-working and updating of classical myth. However, you wish to see Frankenstein is a good read if you enjoy 'thrillers' with a serious point.

Characters

Victor Frankenstein

- ✓ A talented, generally sensitive man, willing to share his knowledge with the world.
- ✗ Too absorbed in the making of his creation to think about the consequences.

The Creature

- ✓ Innocent in his nature. Only turns evil after being abandoned and rejected.
- ✗ Takes a savage revenge on the innocent.

Robert Walton

- ✓ Thoughtful, generous and caring towards others.
- ✗ Submissive. Was over-awed by Victor Frankenstein.

Major areas of study

Benevolence

Resolution

The De Laceys

Family relationships

Settings

Sample questions

By referring to at least two characters, discuss the importance of benevolent action in Frankenstein.

What does the creature owe to the De Lacey family?

In which ways does nature enhance the dramatic action of Frankenstein?

In which instances is resolution presented in a good light?

Does Victor Frankenstein ever truly behave as if he belonged to his own family?

Mansfield Park

Ways of Seeing:

It is a love story, Fanny and Edmund overcoming obstacles of family, other attachments and demonic temptations before finding love and marriage in a rectory; it is a satire on Regency England, holding the inconstancy and playfulness of London, as represented by the Crawfords, up to ridicule; it is a plea for peace, a deeply conservative attack on the vigour of the 'improvers'; it is a tale of a social climber, Fanny, who coats her own desires in the language of piety; or perhaps it is even a sustained attack on poor parenting.

Characters:

Fanny

- ✓ a pious, good-natured girl who suffers everything without a murmur
- ✓ is the living, breathing representative of Mansfield Park - orderly and righteous
- ✗ unbearably self-righteous killjoy
- ✗ is an insipid character with no spark or imagination

Edmund

- ✓ an exceptionally strong sense of duty
- ✓ considerate and kind, especially in his care of Fanny
- ✗ dull, dull, dull - and with no apparent sense of humour
- ✗ falls for Mary, who is clearly very wrong for him

Mary

- ✓ clever and witty, with sparkling conversation

✓ full of life and energy

✗ a corrupted representative of London licentiousness

✗ as shallow as a paddling pool

Henry

✓ charming and witty, with a way of making everyone love him

✓ falls for Fanny - and is improved by his courtship of her

✗ fundamentally amoral

✗ represents all that is dangerous in the world of that time

✗ is a dedicated 'improver'

Maria and Julia

✗ foolish young women who are easily seduced

✗ uncaring towards Fanny

✗ selfish and with no sense of duty - either moral or familial

Sir Thomas

✓ upright and moral man who wants the best for his family

✗ allows his daughters and his eldest son to become dissolute, with no sense of morality

✗ far too distant from his children to understand them

Mrs Norris

X an odious, interfering busybody

Major Areas of Study

Improvement...

Love and Money...

The Theatricals...

Sotherton...

Portsmouth...

London versus Mansfield Park...

Duty, duty, duty...

Sample Questions

In what ways does the trip to Sotherton prepare the reader for the dramatic events later in the novel?

To what extent might Fanny Price be described as a truly Christian heroine?

How are the Crawfords presented as dangers to the world of Mansfield Park?

Discuss the importance of the house at Mansfield Park in the novel.

In what ways is Fanny's stay in Portsmouth important to our understanding of the novel?

The Handmaid's Tale

Ways of seeing

The novel is an allegory for the repression of women at the end of the twentieth century, and throughout the history of the human race. In doing this it explores the attitudes to women through all times, many of which we now see as barbaric or merely historical events without considering the impact of such beliefs on a person. It is a warning about what might happen if right wing politics takes hold of the West. Atwood uses Science Fiction conventions to demonstrate the potential in an exaggerated and unrealistic way so that she does not have to be grounded in strict reality. It criticises both men and women, rather than just one particular gender. It is an exploration of one woman's state of mind as she undergoes horrific deprivation and violation of human rights. It is also a novel about the dangers of political apathy and the potential effects of inaction. Memory and how people mythologize are also issues, illustrating individual concerns rather than the purely historical and impersonal.

Characters

Offred

- ✓ Begins to regret her previous inaction and apathy.
- ✓ As narrator, the reader feels sympathy for her.
- ✓ Tells her story, perhaps, allowing people to understand the events of history.
- ✗ Appears too meek - she doesn't do anything to help the cause of women during the takeover.
- ✗ 'Steals' Luke off someone else.

Moirra

- ✓ A strong character with a force of intent (survival) behind her actions.
- ✓ Symbolises hope and freedom and individualism for Offred.
- ✗ Betrays her supposed ideology at Jezebel's.

✗ Is selfish and concerned only with herself.

Fred

✓ Tries to be nice to Offred.

✗ Probably partly responsible for the death and imprisonment of thousands of people.

✗ Cannot and does not show remorse for the previous Offred's death or the suffering of the thousands mentioned above.

Nick

✓ Provides Offred with some happiness.

✓ Maybe rescues her.

✗ Maybe betrays her.

✗ Is a shady character, whose motives and desires are unknown.

Ofglen

✓ Is a member of Mayday, and therefore fighting for freedom.

✓ Kills herself to protect her colleagues: she is selfless.

✗ Puts Offred in danger.

Major areas of study

Women and their roles in society

History

Sex

Memory

Naming

Reading and writing

Sample questions

1. "Although the characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* are shadowy figures and the plot sketchy, it remains a compelling novel." Do you agree?
2. What effect does the use of flashback have on your reactions to Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
3. "Margaret Atwood depicts a world of frightening repression." Remind yourself of chapters 42 and 43, and explore how she portrays control in the novel.
4. Examine the relationship between Offred and Moira, focusing on their meetings at the Red Centre and Jezebel's.

Wuthering Heights

Ways of Seeing

It is a love story of immense emotional and imaginative force. Catherine and Heathcliff are united in death.

It is a powerful evocation of place - the moors.

It is an exploration of two contrasting worlds and moral orders, represented by Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights.

It is a tale of revenge, which knows no bounds.

Above all it is an original novel, both in theme, style and structure.

Characters

Heathcliff

- ✓ Kindred spirit to Catherine
- ✓ Passionate
- ✓ Bullied and degraded by Hindley
- ✗ Brutal, cruel and sadistic
- ✗ Rejects conventional Christian morality; often described in diabolical terms

Catherine

- ✓ Passionate, strong-willed
- ✓ At home on the moors
- ✓ Believes in union with Heathcliff after death
- ✗ Self-centred

✗ Betrays her love for Heathcliff by marrying Edgar

✗ Cruel

✗ Extreme, hysterical

Nelly Dean

✓ Loyal to her employers and acts in their best interests

✓ Warm, approachable, confidante

✓ Lively storyteller

✓ Represents the common sense viewpoint and normal standards of behaviour

✗ Self-righteous, lecturing others on their responsibilities

✗ Critical of others

✗ Decided in her views but can be swayed

Edgar Linton

✓ Gentle and loving husband and father

✓ Civilised

✓ Loyal to Catherine's memory; observes annual ritual of visiting her grave

✗ Over-protective of his daughter

✗ Weak

Hindley

- ✓ Capable of affection in relationship with Frances
- ✗ Jealous of Heathcliff and determined to gain vengeance
- ✗ Violent and cruel in treatment of Heathcliff
- ✗ Lacks self-discipline

Cathy

- ✓ Strong-willed like her mother but affectionate, loving and loyal like her father
- ✓ Spirited
- ✓ Determined, with a strong survival instinct
- ✓ Sensitive to those she cares for
- ✗ Can be devious in getting her own way

Hareton

- ✓ Embodies best qualities of his parents
- ✓ Displays ancient Earnshaw character - strong, tough, resilient, spirited, proud
- ✓ Sensitive, feels deeply, capable of strong attachments
- ✗ Boorish, uncivilised, and violent

Linton Heathcliff

✓ In need of affection

✗ Combines Isabella's weakness and Heathcliff's cruelty

✗ Timid

✗ Unable to sympathise with anyone else; self-pitying

✗ Manipulative, dishonest, and deceptive

Lockwood

✓ Educated, civilised, representative of outside world

✓ Keen observer

✓ Sensitive to mood of people and place

✗ Vain, self-conscious

✗ Out of place in his surroundings

✗ Tends to jump to conclusions

Major Areas of Study

Thrushcross Grange v. Wuthering Heights

Isolation

Imprisonment

Heaven and Hell

Love and Marriage

Revenge

Books

Sample Questions

Comment on the significance of books in the novel.

How true do you find Charlotte Bronte's description of Nelly Dean as a "specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity"?

Using Chapter 15 as a starting point, consider the nature of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff.

How far and in what ways does Chapter 31 both reflect the central issues and contribute to the development of the novel?

What do you find interesting about the structure of the novel?

Show how Emily Bronte is able to convey atmosphere successfully.

Enduring Love

Ways of Seeing

Enduring Love can be read in a variety of ways. It is a tale about love, but primarily about the mysteries of love: the love, which endures between Joe and Clarissa and the unwanted love from Jed, which has to be endured. There are many varieties of love encountered within the novel but all of them are touched by an irrationality, which we cannot safely confine to the religious fanatic Jed. The actions of love can force all of us to succumb to radical change; Joe and Clarissa drift apart and as they do McEwan encourages us to take sides. The novel is also concerned with the competing claims of art and science, with the different ways they try to make sense of the world, how they may work together and how they may be threatened by the other; Joe and Clarissa represent these two ways; hence another major theme, desire for objectivity, the power of having the right perspective, a certainty Jed claims without science or art. Faith becomes a focus too, Jed has faith in God, but how much does Clarissa have in Joe, or Jean Logan in her supposedly adulterous husband? It is also a story about telling stories, at points we don't know whose narrative to trust despite, or maybe because of the different perspectives we're offered, including Wenn and Camia's bogus scientific paper in Appendix One.

Major Areas of Study

Love

Language and Character

Science versus Art

The Catastrophe

Narrative

Children

Faith and Forgiveness

Objectivity

Irrationality

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

Ways of Seeing

It's entertainment, poking fun at human nature and the issues of the day.

It provides an alternative perspective on themes like marriage and the role of women, which are picked up elsewhere in the text.

It challenges and criticises many of the assumptions of the corrupt medieval church and other scholarly writers.

It reveals the concerns of medieval society.

The Battle of the sexes will always be a popular topic.

Major Areas of Study

The Character of the Wife - teller and tale

The Battle of the Sexes

Chaucer's storytelling skill

Humour in the Tale

Marriage

Sample Questions

1. How far does the 'Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale' suit its teller?
2. "Chaucer is a supremely talented story-teller." How far is this borne out in 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'?
3. "Power is more important to the Wife than sex, love or money." Discuss.
4. Discuss the struggle between 'experience' and 'authority' in 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue'.
5. "The Wife's attitude to marriage is above all ambivalent." Discuss with reference to her Prologue and Tale.
6. "Chaucer is a master of comic poetry." Discuss with reference to 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'.

The Whitsun Weddings

Look back over



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