

Approaching an Unseen Poem - A Guide

Write the mnemonic

The (TITLE) silly (SPEAKER) ass (AUDIENCE) can't (CONTENT) state (STYLE) the (TONE) format (FORM/STRUCTURE)

at the top of the question paper and use it to help you structure your response to the poem as the question on the higher paper is usually quite general.

Identify the **keywords** in the question and how the mnemonic relates to these.

For instance, in this question which appeared in an exam

What do you think the poet is saying about the way that some students approach poetry and how it should be approached? How does he present his ideas?

the first sentence relates to **content**, while the second relates to the other features: (the **title** he's chosen; the perspective he's writing from (**speaker**); to whom he's directing the poem (**audience**); the language he's selected and the literary devices he's employed (**style**); the way he's presented it on the page (**form**).

If you find the poem difficult and don't really understand it, here are a few things you can do which will help to gain you marks. (Having coloured highlighters would be helpful!)

Underline all the verbs – then choose an interesting one and explain why the poet has used it.

Underline all the visual images and pick one which you feel is particularly vivid to comment on.

Underline all the sounds employed in the poem. These might be obvious if they are onomatopoeic, but look for examples of assonance or consonance or alliteration or sibilance or internal rhyme. Then you can pick one or two and explain the effect the poet was trying to achieve.

Underline all the adjectives and choose one which you think is used in an interesting/powerful way.

Underline any similes and metaphors in the poem. Pick out one or two and explain what they mean. Say why they are effective

Look at the places where the poet has chosen to break the lines. Find one **line break** that you can comment on which throws deliberate emphasis onto some particular word or phrase for a reason.

Always refer to the poet by his **surname** in your answer.

