Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Unseen poetry

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The unseen questions (AQA)

- Question 27.1 (24 marks): analyse how the poet presents an idea in one poem you haven't seen before.
- Question 27.2 (8 marks): compare the methods the poets use in two unseen poems. Only the methods are assessed here.
- Spend about 45 minutes on the whole section.

Reading an unseen poem

- Read it twice: first for its overall meaning, then closely. Work out who the speaker is, what situation they are in, and what the **tone** is. Does it change?
- Use the title and the ending as clues, and look for a turning point (a **volta**).

Analysing methods

- Language: imagery (similes, metaphors, personification), word choices and their connotations, and sound (alliteration, sibilance, onomatopoeia).
- Structure: **stanza** and line lengths, **enjambment** and **caesura**, repetition, shifts in tone, and the ending.
- Form: sonnet, **free verse** or dramatic monologue, and whether the rhyme and rhythm are regular or broken.

Writing the answer

- Begin with an overview of what the poem is about. Analyse methods using short quotations, explain their effects on the reader, and offer other possible interpretations.
- (AQA) For 27.2, compare only the methods, using comparative words such as 'similarly' and 'whereas'.

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On your exam board (Edexcel and OCR)

- (Edexcel) You compare two unseen poems in one answer.
- (OCR) You compare an unseen poem with a poem from your anthology cluster.
- The reading and analysis skills here work for every board.

How to get top marks

- Start with what the poem is about in one sentence: you can't analyse what you haven't understood. It's fine to say 'perhaps'.
- Then look for one or two moments that really stand out, and say what they do. You don't need to spot everything.
- In the short comparison (8 marks on AQA), compare methods only, and spend about 10 minutes on it.

Key terms

Enjambment	When a sentence runs on from one line to the next.
Caesura	A pause in the middle of a line.
Volta	A turning point in a poem.
Stanza	A group of lines in a poem, like a paragraph.
Free verse	Poetry with no regular rhyme or rhythm.
Rhyme scheme	The pattern of rhymes at the ends of lines.
Iambic pentameter	A line of ten syllables, alternating unstressed and stressed.
Tone	The mood or attitude of a poem's voice.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is enjambment?
2. What is a caesura?
3. What is a volta?
4. What is free verse?
5. What is iambic pentameter?
6. How many marks is AQA Literature question 27.1 worth? (AQA)
7. What does question 27.2 ask you to compare? (AQA)
8. What should you do first with an unseen poem?

Answers

1. When a sentence runs on from one line to the next
2. A pause in the middle of a line

Your notes

3. A turning point in a poem
4. Poetry with no regular rhyme or rhythm
5. A line of ten syllables, alternating unstressed and stressed
6. 24
7. The methods the poets use
8. Read it through for its overall meaning

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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