

GCSE (9–1)
Delivery Guide

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H472
For first teaching in 2015

**Responding to
unseen texts**

Version 2



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Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: Expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected which best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

If you have any feedback on this Delivery Guide or suggestions for other resources you would like OCR to develop, please email resourcesfeedback@ocr.org.uk.

KEY



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Spoken Language activity



Curriculum Content

Reading comprehension: *Literal and inferential*

- exploring aspects of plot, characterisation, events and settings
- distinguishing between what is explicit and what is implied.

Reading critically: *Critical Reading*

- identifying key themes
- supporting a personal point of view about the text with textual evidence
- evaluating how language, form and structure create impact
- using understanding of contextual information to inform evaluation of a text
- recognising that different interpretations of a text are valid
- critically comparing and contrasting texts.

Writing: *Producing clear and coherent texts*

- using vocabulary and sentence structures with clarity and purpose
- developing and maintaining a point of view
- organising and emphasising key ideas, using evidence from the text including quotes.



CONSTRUCTING AN ENGLISH LITERATURE CURRICULUM

Responding to unseen texts requires students to make decisions independently and to 'think on their feet'. It is important to stress, though, that it is a skills-based exercise, building on key skills developed during a GCSE English Literature course:

- Structuring a personal response to show clarity of understanding and a coherent argument in response to a text (AO1)
- Examining in detail a writer's choices of language, structure and form to create effects (AO2)
- Understanding the conventions of literature from different periods and how texts might be interpreted differently by different readers (AO3)
- Structuring clear and accurate writing for specific purposes and audiences (AO4).

The aim is to build student confidence in responding to unseen texts, recognising that there are many 'cross-over' skills that can be developed steadily through their study of a wide range of texts of different forms and genres. In developing informed personal responses to unfamiliar texts, students can enjoy the creativity of bringing their own fresh, original ideas to the reading of a text or texts.

To prepare students successfully, responding to unseen texts ideally needs to be embedded in English curriculum teaching and learning: it develops comprehension skills learnt at Key

Stages 2 and 3. Younger students are used to tackling new material within time constraints and can respond to short-answer questions when they meet a text for the first time.

The challenge is to encourage development of those initial, often content-based, encounters into the ability to write an extended response. This can be developed through:

- Comprehension questions of increasing demand
- Growing emphasis on writers' effects and reader response
- Greater knowledge of genre and form
- Bullet points and writing frames as initial scaffolding for the unseen response
- Gradually taking scaffolding away so that students' responses become genuinely personal, backed up with textual evidence.

As questions become more open, they allow students to shape their own reactions to what they are reading. This guide uses this approach, with activities becoming progressively more challenging.

Preparing students to respond to unseen texts

Reading literature set texts will help students develop skills for the unseen examination, but it is important that you give them plenty of opportunities to respond to unseen texts, using a variety of strategies.



Thinking Conceptually

In preparing students to respond to unseen texts, you should draw from as wide a range of material as possible, also to encourage reading and engagement with literature beyond the set texts. This could include students' choice of texts, reflecting their own interests and enthusiasms. There is scope to explore different traditions, forms and genres, as well as different literary styles and techniques. Having said that, the work on literature set texts can be carefully integrated with work on preparing students to respond to unseen texts. You might find it an efficient use of time to initially treat as unseen texts:

- Carefully selected poems from poetry anthologies or set texts
- Extracts from prose set texts before they are studied in class.

It is often helpful to group texts by theme to aid comprehension, so that comparisons and contrasts can be readily drawn. A set text could form one of the texts, and other shorter unseen texts could be used for comparisons, of, for example, theme, structure, implied audience, grammatical and/or vocabulary choices.

You can tailor your choice of unseen extracts (which could be from a novel, a play, an anthology, or a poem or part thereof) to the interests and abilities of your students. It is probably helpful to begin with more accessible texts, starting with

ones which are familiar to your students, possibly written in contemporary English and/or which have a distinctive style that students will readily recognise. However, make sure you also introduce students to texts that appear more challenging at first reading, such as those written in verse, in archaic English, or in styles that might be unfamiliar to modern readers. Give some thought to working out at what point unseen texts might be most effectively integrated with work on set texts.

It is important that you give students opportunities to discuss and explore texts individually and in groups, to develop understanding that texts can be interpreted differently by different readers, and that personal response needs to be justified and supported with evidence. Students should also be encouraged to find and select their own texts for discussion on a given theme.

Building student confidence

Introductory activities to support understanding and responding to unseen texts should focus on developing the skills of close reading. The selection of texts is important. It is useful to focus on students' responses to more readily accessible short prose extracts or poems using texts from different time periods and genres. Through these activities students should become familiar with recognising and discussing a range of literary devices, building on their Key



Thinking Conceptually

Stage 3 knowledge and understanding. Pair and collaborative small group work at this stage can help build students' confidence.

Increasingly more challenging texts can then be introduced. Students can be given opportunities to 'mark' and evaluate their own and others' work, following discussion of the marking criteria. Class discussion of specific points or examples of student work (whether genuine or created by you to illustrate a specific point), both good and bad (but always anonymous), can be enlightening. Students should look for:

- points well developed/not developed fully
- points well supported/ not supported by textual reference
- concise, helpful quotations/excessively long quotations
- useful analysis/lack of analytical comment
- ways of improving/developing the work.

This kind of activity enables students to take responsibility for their own and others' learning: they can engage actively with the assessment process and it encourages collaborative learning.

Well chosen unseen texts are potentially accessible to students of varying ability through personal response: all students are able to say why they like what they like. This can be encouraged through:

- Appreciating the structure of a text, exploring its beginning, development and ending
- Using brief quotation to comment on the effect of significant details of language use
- Informed personal response: what makes an emotional impact on them as readers?

Quite apart from the challenge, most students enjoy the freedom and freshness of experience of reading unseen texts. Encourage them to recognise and appreciate that texts are open to interpretation and that their reading of a text, if textually supported, is a valid one. Students welcome not having to write to a formula, and the opportunity to express their own views.

Unseen work stimulates students to read more widely in the GCSE years. Introduce poetry on topics they are exploring in their own writing, or look at descriptive fiction or travel writing alongside thematically-linked reading material for GCSE English Language.

Use poetry anthologies set by exam boards, which group poetry by theme (eg war, love etc). Ask students in groups to make their own selection of poems for an anthology, with each group given a theme, and each student given the task of finding a poem to include and explaining why they liked it. Encourage individual student choices, and opinions.



Thinking Contextually

ACTIVITIES

This delivery guide offers a way of introducing your students to the challenge and potential enjoyment of responding to unseen texts. Many of the activities can be adapted to fit with your own choice of texts. The aim is to provide an integrated approach to building students' confidence with reading and analysing poetry and prose texts independently. This guide focuses on encouraging students to engage with the texts they are given, responding to them through using their senses and offering them a clear framework within which to work. The emphasis is on students honing their critical and analytical skills, developing a critical writing style and broadening their understanding of literary traditions. These are transferable skills which develop general academic confidence, incisiveness and coherence of thought.

The selection of texts for this guide all concern early childhood and contrast innocence and experience. The choice of theme allows comparison between more recent texts and 19th century literature, including Romantic poetry.

The earlier activities in this guide focus on poetry and suggest teaching strategies which help students examine the different layers of meaning within a poem, later introducing skills of comparative analysis. These activities are designed to be teacher-led and involve both group and pair work, as well as peer support and review.

The writing activities in this guide are broken down into shorter questions to help students focus on different aspects of the text, particularly recognising literary devices and how to comment constructively on their effects.

Oracy can be integrated throughout a Literature course to support students in developing their ideas about a text.

Specific spoken language activities are signposted in this guide  and can be used to provide crossover activities with GCSE English Language, such as presentations and paired discussions.



Thinking Contextually

Suggested teaching activities in this guide:	Resources
<p>Learner Resource 1: Exploring a poem</p> <p>Series of developmental activities (reading, writing and spoken language) focussing on sensory experiences related to the seaside.</p> <p>Linked exploration of a single poem, On this Island by W. H. Auden, including a written task for students to capture their personal interpretation.</p>	
<p>Learner Resource 2: Reading a poem independently</p> <p>Series of teacher-led activities analysing language and effects in The Early Purges by Seamus Heaney.</p>	
<p>Learner Resource 3: Reading a prose extract independently</p> <p>Series of teacher-led activities based on an extract from The Other Side of the Hill by Ted Hughes. Focus on exploring characterisation and theme.</p>	
<p>Learner Resource 4: Comparing two poems</p> <p>Framework for comparing two poems - Nurse's Song by William Blake and Spring and Fall: to a young child by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Comprising a series of developmental activities covering overview, analysis, contrast and evaluation.</p>	



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

Well chosen unseen texts often evoke a strong visual response in readers. Learners can be engaged through exploring the images which writers create, both in poetry and prose. The descriptive elements of such writing can be used to enhance students' own personal and descriptive work for GCSE English Language.

ACTIVITY ONE

Most young people enjoy trips to the seaside and we can all remember our experiences, whether pleasurable or disastrous!

Ask students to remember their last visit to the seaside, whether in the UK or abroad. What do they remember:

- Seeing?
- Hearing?
- Smelling?
- Tasting?
- Feeling?

SL Begin by discussing these sensory experiences literally. How did the literal sensation relate to other more metaphorical feelings, such as relaxation, freedom or a view as far as the horizon?

Ask students to write a descriptive paragraph which includes each of the senses and uses them to recapture their memories of the experience of being *'By the Seaside'*.

*Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside
I do like to be beside the sea!
I do like to stroll along the Prom, Prom, Prom!
Where the brass bands play: "Tiddely-om-pom-pom!"
So just let me be beside the seaside
I'll be beside myself with glee
And there's lots of girls beside,
I should like to be beside
Beside the seaside!
Beside the sea!*

The music-hall lyric "Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside" is a familiar one. For Sherlock fans, there's a performance by Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes on youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmJVXHLjVhk. The lyric is also quoted at the end of rock band Queen's 'The Seven Seas of Rhye'; see youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EvL7-9RVGE



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

What kinds of seaside experience does the lyric (short poem) remind students of?

How does the song use examples of the 'building blocks' of poetry and what is their effect?

Technique	Example	Effect
Individual voice		
Rhyme		
Rhythm		
Repetition		
Implied meaning		

- 1) The word 'beside' is repeated eight times. What is the effect of this?
- 2) What are its several meanings here?
- 3) What does it suggest about where the singer wants to be, and who he wants to be with?
- 4) How does the whole poem communicate a sense of fun and suggestiveness?
- 5) Is there anything especially 'English' about this kind of experience?



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

ACTIVITY TWO

Students can develop their earlier work in different ways:

- 1) Continue their descriptive paragraph, and structure a short essay about a single day at the seaside, using the senses to develop the precise use of description. Use different times of day, or the movement of the tide, as a framework for each paragraph. Writing should be concise and aim to communicate a strong sensory effect to those who read or hear it read aloud.
- 2) Collect images of the seaside eg seaside postcards and views. Write a paragraph to explain what the image suggests to those who look at it, and how it does this.
- SL 3) Find a short musical passage which describes the sea (eg part of Benjamin Britten's Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes, Rod Stewart's Sailing or the overture to The Flying Dutchman). How does the music suggest the sea to the listener through sound and rhythm?
- SL 4) In pairs, dramatise the encounter between two strangers on a beach. Do they discover they have something in common? What are the consequences?
- SL Get students into small groups, allocate the different follow-up activities suggested above and encourage performance and presentation of what they have discovered or written.



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

ACTIVITY THREE

As a starter, ask students to play word association, and to use their discoveries in the previous activities to write down single words associated with being 'by the sea', especially sights, sounds and feelings.

Now read this poem to the class.

On this Island by W. H Auden

Look, stranger, on this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.

Here at a small field's ending pause
Where the chalk wall falls to the foam and its tall ledges
Oppose the pluck
And knock of the tide,
And the shingle scrambles after the suck-
-ing surf, and a gull lodges
A moment on its sheer side.

Far off like floating seeds the ships
Diverge on urgent voluntary errands,
And this full view
Indeed may enter
And move in memory as now these clouds do,
That pass the harbour mirror
And all the summer through the water saunter.



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

Discuss the following questions:

- 1) How does the poet draw the reader's attention from the beginning?
- 2) What does he see?
- 3) What does he hear?
- 4) Which tense does he use?
- 5) How does he use sound effects to capture the seascape?
- 6) What individual images or pictures can you remember?
- 7) What kind of feeling do you think he is communicating?

SL Now encourage a group re-reading of the poem. First, different students can read different stanzas, then different students can read different lines.

This can be followed by some silent reading and thinking time, with a copy of the poem in front of them, with response to the following questions:

- 1) Underline each instance of alliteration (ie word beginning with the same sound or consonant). Choose one of the examples and write down what effect the use of alliteration has.
- 2) Write a short paragraph on the different sights introduced by each stanza.
- 3) If each line is meant to occupy the same space in time, then some lines are quite fast, and others slow. What is the effect of these changes in rhythm?
- 4) What sound does the poet most want you to listen to?
- 5) How do 'pluck' and 'knock' imitate the sound of the tide (onomatopoeia)?
- 6) What is the effect of the way he breaks 'suck-ing surf' across two lines?
- 7) What does he think is the effect of paying silent attention?
- 8) Can you link the poem to your own memories?

SL Discuss your responses in pairs or groups, before feeding back to the whole class in plenary.



Learner Resource 1 Exploring a poem

Plenary

Together, discuss where the poet is standing (his viewpoint) and how he encourages the reader to share it.

- Where do you think he is?
- Why does he emphasise being on the margin or on the edge?
- What point is he making?
- Does it make any difference to know that the poem was written in the 1930s, which the poet called a 'low dishonest decade', not too long before World War Two?
- Can you tell that the poem was always intended to be set to music? (Benjamin Britten did this.)
- Can you tell that it was probably originally intended to accompany a film?

Now look together at the most challenging stanza, the last one:

And this full view

Indeed may enter

And move in memory as now these clouds do,

That pass the harbour mirror

And all the summer through the water saunter.

Students can form their own personal responses to:

1. The choice of the word 'saunter'.
2. The 'tone' or music of these lines (what the reader hears).
3. The overall 'mood' (what the reader feels).
4. Why the harbour is a 'mirror'.
5. What Auden might mean by 'the full view'.

Explain to students that they have now explored Assessment Objectives 2 and 3:

- They have analysed form, structure, and language and their effect
- They have explored the relationship between the text and its context.

Written Outcome

To meet Assessment Objective 1, students need to be able to turn their discoveries into a piece of writing, using short quotations to illustrate their own interpretation (ie personal reading) of the poem. They should write between 400 and 600 words in answer to the following question:

How does the poet encourage you to share what he sees and feels at the edge of the sea?

Extension Activity

Those who have enjoyed the poem could also explore Auden's Night Mail (1936), also available on youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmcuKsBOi0



Learner Resource 2 Reading a poem independently

This is intended as a class activity to be led by the teacher – it can be done in pairs or individually depending on the ability range. The different stages should be followed by discussion to share views and ideas.

Read the following poem and work through the suggested activities.

Seamus Heaney was born on April 13, 1939, on a farm in Castledawson, County Derry, Northern Ireland, the eldest of eight children.

The Early Purges by Seamus Heaney

I was six when I first saw kittens drown.
Dan Taggart pitched them, 'the scraggy wee shits',
Into a bucket; a frail metal sound,

Soft paws scraping like mad. But their tiny din
Was soon soused. They were slung on the snout
Of the pump and the water pumped in.

'Sure isn't it better for them now?' Dan said.
Like wet gloves they bobbed and shone till he sluiced
Them out on the dunghill, glossy and dead.

Suddenly frightened, for days I sadly hung
Round the yard, watching the three sogged remains
Turn mealy and crisp as old summer dung

Until I forgot them. But the fear came back
When Dan trapped big rats, snared rabbits, shot crows
Or, with a sickening tug, pulled old hens' necks.

Still, living displaces false sentiments
And now, when shrill pups are prodded to drown
I just shrug, 'Bloody pups'. It makes sense:

'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
Where they consider death unnatural,
But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.



Learner Resource 2 Reading a poem independently

Suggested activities

1. Write a short paragraph briefly explaining what the poem is about on a literal level.
2. The title of the poem is The Early Purges. Purges means an abrupt or violent removal of a group. How do you think it is used to effect in the title?

Look at The Early Purges again and think about its deeper meaning or implied meaning.

3. What is the narrator's attitude when he is a child and how is it revealed? Pick out words and phrases that suggest his attitude changes when he grows up. What are the key words and phrases of his 'innocent' state as compared to his 'experienced' state?
4. What do you think the narrator of the poem has learnt at the end? And what do you think he has lost?
5. How does the poet use language to engage you and deepen your understanding of the poem? Pick out some words and phrases that are powerful and work out how they create a response – use the table below and add more examples of your own.

Choice of language/ literary technique	Example/Quote	Effect
Direct speech/slang	'Scraggy wee shits'	
Alliteration	'Soft paws scraping'	
Oxymoron	'tiny din'	
Alliteration	'slung on the snout'	
Simile	'Like wet gloves'	

6. Create your own title for the poem and write a brief paragraph explaining why you think it would work well.



Learner Resource 3 Reading a prose extract independently

This is intended as a class activity to be led by the teacher – it can be done in pairs or individually depending on the ability range. The different stages should be followed by discussion to share view and ideas, but it is important that the students attempt each stage independently.

Read the following prose text and work through the suggested activities.

Extract from *The Other Side of the Hill* by Ted Hughes

"We're off now."

"They'll never catch us."

"We'll never go back till we're rich."

The three of them sat on the hilltop and looked down at the town, a dark reeking pit, where the first lights were glowing like embers in a raked-out campfire. They had already come over a mile. And on the other side of the hill lay...

Well, Brian knew. With his thin legs like a linnet and his great brain behind spectacles like oyster shells, he had it all worked out. He knew just what roots and leaves you could eat and which would stretch you out like a cod on a slab. He knew the constellations and so could tell which direction to travel in at night. He said he knew how to make a canoe out of a log, by burning it hollow with little fires. The other two, Bert and Bloodnut, trusted him completely.

"When shall we eat?" asked Bert. "We've got to keep our strength up."

He had cheese and a tin of tongue. Bloodnut had a packet of dates and a banana. Brian had nothing.

"Eat?" demanded Brian indignantly. "Eat? Tonight we've got to keep going. They'll be after us by eleven. We want to be far away by morning. Safe. Then we can eat. Then we'll hunt something."

Bloodnut fingered the shilling in his back pocket. He was already wishing he had brought a meat pie.

"Come on." Brian got up. The other two got up. Brian looked up at the sky but there were no stars yet. He led off in the direction away from the town.

linnet – small British garden bird
constellation – star grouping

Suggested activities

1. Write a short paragraph briefly explaining what is happening in this extract.
2. What is the effect of the first three sentences – written in direct speech – on you, the reader?
3. Consider the physical description of Brian in the sentence 'With his thin legs like a linnet and his great brain behind spectacles like oyster shells, he had it all worked out.' How does this description affect your interpretation of Brian's character?



Learner Resource 3 Reading a prose extract independently

4. How does the writer develop Brian's character in the same paragraph?
5. Pick out a phrase in the paragraph that suggests that Brian may not be telling the truth. How does that make the final sentence of the paragraph – 'The other two, Bert and Bloodnut, trusted him completely' – humorous?
6. Now pick out interesting words and phrases to include in the grid below and explain their effects on the reader.

Choice of language/ literary technique	Example/Quote	Effect
Direct speech/slang	'We'll never go back till we're rich.'	
Metaphor	'a dark reeking pit'	
Simile	'like embers in a raked-out campfire'	

Written outcome

7. Write a paragraph analysing how the writer makes this extract entertaining and amusing. You should use quotations in your response.



Learner Resource 4 Comparing two poems

Both these poems are written by poets observing children and their reactions to the world around them. One was written at the end of the 18th century and the other towards the end of the 19th century.

Remind students on first reading the poems that the tone and mood of a poem are what we should first listen for, and that we should not worry about the lines we find difficult. As in *On this Island*, earlier in the guide, the music of the poem and its visual imagery will reveal more on first reading than puzzling over exactly what the poet means by some of his more complex ideas.

Nurse's Song by William Blake

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise
Come come leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies

No no let us play, for it is yet day
And we cannot go to sleep
Besides in the sky, the little birds fly
And the hills are all cover'd with sheep

Well well go & play till the light fades away
And then go home to bed
The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd
And all the hills echoed

Spring and Fall: to a young child by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

Comparison of texts needs a framework. Let us explore a typical question for a comparative unseen exercise.

Compare the ways in which both poets encourage you to think about the actions of the children they observe.

- 1) The phrase 'the ways in which' is often used to encourage response to language, form and structure (AO2).
- 2) The focus of the question is clearly on the children, but also on the interpretation of their play, or of their tears. The context (AO3) will be different understandings of the relationship between innocence and experience.
- 3) An informed personal response (AO1) will explore the poets' intentions but also the effect of tone and mood on the reader, and will come to independent judgements supported by quotation.



Learner Resource 4 Comparing two poems

Step One - Overview: What do these poems have in common?

The poems have been put together for a reason and that should be your starting point. They are obviously linked by theme.

Write a short paragraph giving an overview of why the Nurse in Nurse's Song agrees to let the children continue playing even as the sun begins to go down, and why the poet in Spring and Fall is so touched by the child's tears as the golden leaves of Autumn fall.

SL Get the students to work in pairs.

Share your understanding of the overall 'story' of each poem with your partner.

Write an introductory paragraph, supported by two short quotations, explaining why you are looking at the two poems together.

Step Two – Analysis

It is important when reading unseen texts to go beyond the surface meaning or 'story' and begin to explore how the text works and why it was written.

It is easiest to begin by asking **how** questions.

How do both poets use relatively **simple forms** to communicate the world of the children? Fill in the table which follows.

Fill in the table below.

Technique	Example	Effect
Rhyme in Blake		
Rhyme in Hopkins		
Rhythm in Blake		
Rhythm in Hopkins		
Repetition in Blake		
Alliteration in Hopkins		
Internal Rhyme		
Assonance		

The last two effects are slightly more difficult to find: internal rhymes are within the lines, not at the end.

Assonance occurs when the vowel sounds are similar but there is not a full rhyme.



Learner Resource 4 Comparing two poems

Both poems are highly descriptive. What is the effect of the following descriptions of the natural world:

Quotation	Effect
laughing is heard on the hill	
the sun is gone down And the dews of night arise	
in the sky, the little birds fly	
till the light fades away	
all the hills echoed	
Goldengrove unleaving	
worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie	
Sorrow's springs	
the blight	

Are all the references to nature in Blake happy ones? Are all the references in Hopkins sad?

Both clearly relate the natural cycle of day followed by night, or Spring followed by Fall (Autumn) to time, to life and death, and to the eventual passing of childhood.

Why does the Nurse want to protect the children? Why does Hopkins say to Margaret 'yet you will weep and know why'? What do they want to guard the children from?

Write an analytical paragraph, supported by six short quotations, exploring the ways in which the poets use similar forms and address similar concerns.

Step Three – Contrast: how do the poems differ?

Clearly the children in Nurse's Song are happy and carefree, whereas in Spring and Fall, Margaret is upset and her tears are interpreted by the poet as showing her understanding of sadness in the natural world and in human existence. You could say that one poem celebrates careless innocence and the other mourns the cares of time and experience.

The instruction to **Compare** always assumes 'and contrast' – in other words you should look at similarities but also differences when comparing texts, and the differences are usually more interesting.

How do they communicate different attitudes to the loss of innocence?

In Blake, we actually hear what the children say. Their voices are in stanza 3. Why do they think they should stay out? How is their joy and carelessness communicated to you?



Learner Resource 4 Comparing two poems

Complete the following table of contrasts, commenting on their effect:

Blake quotation	Hopkins quotation	Effect
laughing is heard on the hill	Margaret, are you grieving	
My heart is at rest	as the heart grows older It will come to such sights colder	
everything else is still	worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie	
let us away	you will weep and know why	
leaped & shouted & laugh'd	What heart heard of, ghost guessed	
we cannot go to sleep	It is Margaret you mourn for	

Although there are darker undertones, Blake seems to be celebrating innocent carelessness and physical joy, while Hopkins is predicting future cares and spiritual concerns.

Write an analytical paragraph, supported by six short quotations, explaining the ways in which the poems differ.

Step Four – Evaluation: decide which you like more and why

We have explored how both poets use simple forms to recapture the world of children (AO2), but for both the children's instinctive reactions also **symbolise** innocence which is endangered and soon to be lost.

Romantic poets like Blake were influenced by **Enlightenment** ideas about the natural innocence of children, unconstrained by the rules and regulations of society.

Hopkins, a **Victorian** poet and a **Catholic**, was concerned that the cycles of nature showed a damaged or fallen world, and that such damage was often caused by the actions of mankind, in their pursuit of knowledge.

A critical response needs to show awareness of the writer's purpose as well as methods, and the effect of the writer's choice of words on the reader.

How does context (AO3) help you to appreciate the poets' interest in the innocence of childhood, and why such innocence is threatened by the shadows of night and decay?

After you have analysed *how* a poem works, you are better able to say *why* it was written.

- Which poem makes the stronger effect on your own mood, and why?
- Are children careless, or do they instinctively understand what is sad about the world?
- How much should children be protected from the realities of life and death?
- Which view of the world, and of childhood, do you agree with more?
- Which poet's view of the natural world is closer to your own?

Remember that any **personal** response is a valid one if it is **supported by the words of the text**. You need to continue quoting in your concluding, evaluation paragraph. Which lines sum up the poems for you?

Write a concluding paragraph, supported by two short quotations, giving your own comparative opinion of these poems about childhood and innocence.



Learner Resource 4 Comparing two poems

Explain to students how their paragraphs, put together, form a critical, informed and argued response to the original question:

Compare the ways in which both poets encourage you to think about the actions of the children they observe.

The framework used was the following:

- 1) Overview: explain similarities of theme and content
- 2) Analysis of similarities: exploring form and its relationship to context
- 3) Analysis of differences: comparing and contrasting choices of language and image and their implications
- 4) Evaluation: using context and individual judgement and response to provide a supported critical opinion.

Extension Activities

This Nurse's Song is one of Blake's Songs of Innocence. Compare the poem with the poem of the same title in Blake's Songs of Experience. How do the two Nurses differ? How can you tell the children are older? What do you think the poet intends us to feel about this Nurse?

Compare Hopkins's Spring and Fall with his poem Inversnaid, written at around the same time. How does this poem use sound effects to capture both the beauty and the darker undercurrents of nature? What does the comparison reveal about the poet's attitude to the natural world?





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