

Learner Resource 7 “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract” – a comparison

In the exam you are asked to compare two poems. This activity poses the following exam-type question:

- Explore how Blake presents religion in “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract”.

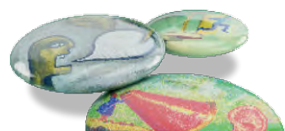
You should consider his use of stylistic techniques, as well as any other relevant contexts.

Below are two tables to help you to find ideas for your essay. Divide yourselves into pairs: one of you is responsible for completing table one and the other is responsible for completing table two.

Once you have completed your half of the table, you can either take it in turns to give feedback to the class, or swap one of your completed tables with another pair, so that you have the two halves to refer to when you write your essay.

Table one: “The Human Abstract”

“The Divine Image”	“The Human Abstract”
<p>Context: In the <i>Songs of Innocence</i> – rhetorical praise of God and man and the connections between them. Reference to the ballad form, and the common hymn metre. Possible links to “The Human Abstract”, “The Divine Image”.</p>	
<p>Structure: Introduction (human interaction with the abstract qualities of Mercy, Pity etc.), development (qualities seen in human behaviour and form), elaboration (unity of those qualities and God), conclusion (man, these qualities and God are one and the same – if we live by these qualities then we are close to God).</p>	
<p>Voice: First person plural, with the possessive pronoun “our” presuming a shared belief “our father dear”. Nature of the voice – declarative sentences suggest a confidence, that this is a statement of an accepted truth about the connection between man and God.</p>	
<p>Form: Five ballad stanzas (quatrains or four-line verses, with alternate three and four metrical stresses). Form of common metre of hymns (8, 6, 8, 6) typically used to teach, state facts or recount a story. Iambic – increasing the sense of a connection to hymns and songs.</p>	



Learner Resource 7

"The Divine Image"	"The Human Abstract"
<p>Lexical groups: Man (x2) father, child, human (x6), pray/s (x3), God (x2), Mercy (x6), Pity (x6), Peace (x6), Love (x6), divine (x2), distress (x2), form (x2) – repetitions indicate the song-like quality of this poem, teaching the reader about the nature of God. Contrasts of distress-delight, for example.</p>	
<p>Syntax: Parallelism of "Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love" – sense of a song or chant. Verbs: present tense – suggesting the enduring truth of this didactic song.</p>	
<p>Figurative Language: Imagery – personification of abstract nouns (they "dwell" in line 19) as well as being qualities of man – stressing the unity of man, those qualities and God.</p>	
<p>Graphology: Capitalisation of abstract nouns, God and Man – highlighting the connection between them, perhaps.</p>	



Learner Resource 7

Table two: "The Divine Image"

"The Divine Image"	"The Human Abstract"
	<p>Context: In the <i>Songs of Experience</i> – direct comment on "The Divine Image": destructive forces of a society that corrupts those divine qualities in man's brain. Possible links to "Poison Tree", "London", "Garden of Love".</p>
	<p>Structure: First verse sets up the argument, involving the reader with the pronoun "we" (Blake changed "If there was nobody poor" to "If we did not make somebody poor", thereby making the reader responsible). Systematically works through the abstract qualities in the same order as they are listed in line 1 of "The Divine Image". A narrative of the sustained metaphor of the way in which the tree of humility grows from cruelty, culminating in the confirmation that all these abstract qualities are actually the products of the human brain.</p>
	<p>Voice: First person plural, pronoun "we" used twice in the first verse. Nature of voice: move from conditional tense in first verse (modals: "would", "could") that might imply a level of uncertainty, moving to present tense that suggests that this is an enduring truth. Sense of a developing argument about the way in which minds nurture traits of cruelty, mystery and deceit.</p>
	<p>Form: Regularity of six quatrains with two rhyming couplets in each verse. Trochaic trimeter – unbroken rhythm increases the sense of relentlessly pursuing an argument. Three beat lines repeated throughout.</p>



Learner Resource 7

"The Divine Image"	"The Human Abstract"
	<p>Lexical groups: Pity, Mercy, Peace, selfish loves, mystery (x2), feed-eat, sought-find, snare baits, waters-tears-sea, spreads (x2), root-tree-grows, caterpillar-fly-raven. Repetitions indicate the metaphor of the tree has taken over the abstract qualities (the growth of a system of values based on fear etc.). Contrasts – positive and negative (pity exists as a response to poverty etc.).</p>
	<p>Syntax: Parallelism of conjunctions "and" (x7) and "then" (x2) – used to create effect of building an argument. Verbs: contrast between present tense throughout (suggesting a state that still exists) and the past tense in line 22 ("sought") – a completed activity: the Gods looked, and failed to find.</p>
	<p>Figurative Language: Imagery – personification of Cruelty. Mercy, Pity have become values or abstractions to be critiqued. The iterative image of the tree growing from humility, but producing the negative qualities of Mystery, Deceit etc. Raven symbolising death etc. Associations with repressive society and established religion.</p>
	<p>Graphology: capitalisation of abstract nouns and "Nature" – signalling their symbolic nature.</p>

