

Oxford Revise | AQA GCSE English Literature: Unseen Poetry | Answers

Mark scheme

Behind each exam question is a set of assessment objectives (AOs). The examiner will use these AOs to help mark your answer. If you answer the question accurately, you will automatically cover all the AOs.

Level	Marks	Explanation
1	1–4	<p><i>A simple response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – simple comments relevant to task and text • AO1 – reference to relevant details • AO2 – awareness of writer making choices • AO2 – possible reference to subject terminology
2	5–8	<p><i>A relevant response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – supported response to task and text • AO1 – comments on references • AO2 – identification of writer’s methods • AO2 – some reference to subject terminology
3	9–12	<p><i>An explained response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – some explained response to task and text • AO1 – references used to support a range of relevant comments • AO2 – explained/relevant comments on writer’s methods with some relevant use of subject terminology • AO2 – identification of effects of writer’s methods to create meanings
4	13–16	<p><i>A clear response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – clear, explained response to task and text • AO1 – effective use of references to support explanation • AO2 – clear explanation of writer’s methods with appropriate use of relevant subject terminology • AO2 – understanding of effects of writer’s methods to create meanings

5	17–20	<p><i>A thoughtful response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – thoughtful, developed response to task and text • AO1 – appropriate references integrated into interpretation • AO2 – examination of writer’s methods with subject terminology used effectively to support consideration of methods • AO2 – examination of effects of writer’s methods to create meanings
6	21–24	<p><i>A conceptual response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and text • AO1 – judicious use of precise references to support interpretation • AO2 – analysis of writer’s methods with subject terminology used judiciously • AO2 – exploration of effects of writer’s methods to create meanings

Page 108 Question 1a

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- ideas about love as something that causes strong feelings in those who experience it
- ideas about how love can be a negative and a positive experience
- treatment of how feelings of love can seem irrational or change behaviour
- ideas about how love can bring out the best and worst in people
- possible connections between love and illness, and its effects

AO2

- use of direct address (second person) to present feelings about love
- use of hyperbole to emphasise the strong feelings of the speaker
- use of clichés to present the speaker's feelings about love as something familiar and universally understood
- use and creation of negative imagery to suggest the speaker's feelings
- use of structural features such as enjambment and caesura to present feelings about love
- use of structural features such as a refrain to control the presentation of key ideas and to create rhythm
- examination of how symptoms (nouns) are modified to create distinct imagery concerning feelings about love, such as 'weak knees', 'sharp pain'

Page 109 Question 1b

Relevant content may include:

AO2

- use of refrain in both poems to emphasise feelings about love
- comparison of speakers' focus on a moment in 'I Saw You' and on a longer relationship in 'Symptoms' to present their feelings about love
- comparison of positive or negative imagery created across the poems to reflect the speakers' feelings
- comparison of different rhyme schemes across the poems and how these present the speakers' feelings differently
- comparison of vocabulary choices to create specific tones across the poems

Page 110 Question 2a

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- ideas about what the power of nature means
- ideas about how we can see different types of power within nature
- possible treatment of how there are lessons from nature's power that humans can learn from
- ideas about war and peace

AO2

- use of extended metaphor to present ideas about war/conflict
- use of tone to create contrast
- use of particular images to suggest there is more than one type of power
- use of structural features such as stanzas and enjambment to contain ideas
- personification of elements of nature to show how power is demonstrated in nature

- particular word choices to reinforce different ideas about power, such as the themes of mercy or conflict

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

'Dew' is a poem of strong contrasts, in which Armitage shows two very different ideas about the power of nature. Although the poem is written in free verse, Armitage uses three stanzas to separate his ideas and build images of violence, peace, grace, and beauty in nature. Each element is uniquely powerful in its own way.

Stanza one immediately puts the reader on edge by describing a 'tense' situation, in which nature is ready to explode. Armitage describes the end of a long, dry summer by comparing it to a war or battle. The use of military vocabulary such as 'fuse-wire', 'tapers', and 'primed mortar' suggests the natural world has a violent power simmering below the surface, waiting to erupt like a bomb. The use of consonance by repeating the hard 't' sound in 'tense... touchy... tapers... tinder... trigger' is aggressive, like machine-gun fire. Armitage is communicating a real danger that exists after hot summers – forest or moorland fires – but builds a strong visual image of this event by personifying the spread of fire as a 'march on the moor' by soldiers who are 'ranks of flame'. We can imagine the fire spilling across the dry land like men moving across a battlefield, and this makes the reader feel that nature is powerful, consuming, and destructive.

In contrast, the second stanza has a much more gentle and reflective tone as it describes the dew that silently creeps in – no words connected to sound are present. The hot day has given way to the night, which offers 'cover', extending the metaphor of summer as a siege by implying that the dew is acting against orders by appearing in the field of battle. The dew is personified as though it is tender and caring in delivering water to the casualties of war – the natural elements that were parched by the summer, such as the leaf and the stoat. The dew is shown as merciful, 'tending the weary', and Armitage presents this not as weakness, but as an equally powerful and graceful part of nature. He uses alliteration to describe the 'lips of the leaf' so the reader can imagine the way leaves curl like a mouth when they are dried by the sun. The word choice of 'thimble', a tiny cup that is also protective when worn on the finger, adds to the impression that the dew is small, yet strong. The dew is also shown to create delicate beauty in decorating a symbol of aggression and conflict in war – the 'barbed-wire fence'. Its drops are 'gems', further emphasising the precious and life-giving power of water.

The final stanza of the poem is a surprise – the 'spark' threatened in stanza one is delivered by the rising sun, yet it is transformed from a violent and consuming fire that engulfs the natural world, into a 'fire-star' that is captured and contained within each drop of dew. The reader can imagine how the rays of the sun make the dewdrops sparkle, as though each one is on fire. The power of the dew overcomes the threat of the summer. Armitage may be suggesting how we can see the violence of our world in nature, and also find the peace that comes through offering grace and care to those in need, which is the most powerful gift of all.

Page 111 Question 2b

Relevant content may include:

AO2

- use of extended metaphor in both poems, e.g. a battle/victims of the changing seasons
- comparison of use of stanzas and enjambment across the poems
- use of sensory imagery in both poems, e.g. sight/smell
- use of personification in both poems to portray nature
- comparison of vocabulary choices to create specific tones across the poems
- comparison of alliteration to create images of nature within the different seasons

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Both 'Burning' and 'Dew' present the change of the seasons from summer to autumn as a moment that demonstrates nature's unquestionable power. Both poets use the idea that this change has the potential for violence, by comparing it to a scene of battle or struggle. Binyon talks of a 'ruin' and how the stalks to be burned 'resist', while Armitage talks of the 'stand-off' and trees as 'primed mortar(s)'. The reader feels that the change of the seasons is not something that nature allows to happen – it is something to be fought over as summer clings on and autumn seeks to assert itself.

Both poets use sensory vocabulary to convey a sense of emotional power in how the seasons change. We can feel the dry touch of 'parched grass' and see the 'bog-cotton' waving its white tufty head to 'surrender' to autumn in 'Dew', while 'Burning' overloads our sense of smell with 'burning' and 'smoke' that 'pricks'. While Armitage goes on to adjust the sensory effect of autumn by personifying dew as it makes its appearance in the second stanza, Binyon personifies the fire instead, then uses his second stanza to drive home the power of the seasons and allow autumn a violent victory: 'All burns!'. The images created in stanza two of 'Burning' create a feeling of victory through destruction: the 'fallen tower' and 'extravagant riches spent'. In contrast, the images in 'Dew' that suggest autumn is victorious are peaceful and placatory: the dew is 'tending' the casualties of war and 'lifting its thimble' in a peaceful gesture.

Page 112 Question 3a

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- ideas about the responsibilities of being a mother
- ideas about the challenges and sacrifices that need to be made
- ideas about what it means to be a mother today
- treatment of how motherhood may be difficult for some women to cope with
- treatment of how women are shown to have hopes and dreams beyond being mothers

AO2

- use of extended astronaut/space metaphor or the use of personification and onomatopoeia to present ideas about being overworked, to present attitudes towards being a mother
- use of alliteration to reinforce the imagery of the speaker as a busy mother
- consideration of the use of listing in the first stanza to suggest that being a mother is time-consuming, or the use of stanzas separated into reality and fantasy
- the use of night/day to present ideas about the time that a mother gives to her children and the time she has for herself
- the use of a pun around 'vacuum' to present ideas about wanting peace and quiet
- examination of verbs such as 'counts', 'thinks', 'shuttles', 'feeds' to suggest the speaker's actions as a mother are automatic and unemotional
- consideration of repeated phrase 'counts down' and what this suggests about the speaker's attitude towards her busy life and her ability to continue coping

Page 113 Question 3b

Relevant content may include:

AO2

- use of listing in both poems to suggest mothers make many sacrifices without thinking about them
- comparison of alliteration across the poems
- comparison of vocabulary choices to create specific tones across the poems
- comparison of the use of voice (third-person in 'Countdown' and second-person in 'A Mother's Body') presenting attitudes across the poems
- comparison of the use of rhyme to create rhythm and tone that reflect the speakers' attitudes towards the sacrifices mothers make

Page 114 Question 4a

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- ideas about feeling overwhelmed by life
- ideas about what people can find hard in life
- ideas about how people try to cope when life is difficult
- possible ideas about how people can find comfort in life
- possible treatment of how life as an adult is more difficult than life as a child

AO2

- use of closed form of poetry in three-line stanzas to suggest the speaker is trying to control their panic
- use of strict ABA rhyme scheme across the whole poem to create a monotonous, repetitive rhythm that reflects the poet's tone of negativity
- use of negative images to build an attitude of hopelessness
- use of metaphor to convey ideas about it being difficult to act decisively
- use of questions to suggest a feeling of being overwhelmed
- use of two different refrains to contrast ideas about being weighed down by life and trying to take charge of it

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

The speaker in 'Can't' is sharing a very personal battle with life that they are experiencing. They seem alternatively overwhelmed by life, 'I simply can't get out of bed', and then determined to push back and to try and take back control by pressing the 'reset button'. These two lines are repeated as refrains throughout the poem, and their recurrence has the effect of revealing a mind in turmoil.

Using the first person, the speaker talks openly about their struggle, allowing us a window into their world. As a result, we feel like we are able to understand their attitude that life is sometimes hard and that it's easy to become overwhelmed by it.

The poet has structured the poem rigidly, using three-line stanzas, and a regular metre of 10 beats per line. The rhyme scheme of every stanza is ABA (with one additional A line to finish). Together these elements have several effects. First, they constrict the speaker into expressing their thoughts fleetingly – as though they can't cope with more than one small thought at a time, such as how much they hate their job, or how they feel physically ill with a hangover. Second, the monotonous, repetitive rhythm mirrors the speaker's negative attitude towards life, suggesting they feel it is grinding and relentless, and very difficult to fight against. The formal structure and presentation on the page could be an ironic comment on the illusion people sometimes create on the outside that they are OK and coping. However, inside – and here within the stanzas – they are panicking, and their chaotic, disjointed thoughts are shut in and contained. These seem to have gradually worn the speaker down so that they no longer feel in control and able to cope with life. The word 'can't' in the title is repeated throughout the poem, and is very telling in that it isn't 'won't': they are not behaving lazily or badly in not getting out of bed; they just are no longer able to get out and get on with everyday tasks.

The lines sandwiched in between the refrains reveal many negative thoughts: 'I drank too much', 'my love has gone'. The speaker also throws out questions: 'What do I have instead?', 'Who'll... earn my bread?', suggesting they are overwhelmed by even the ordinary requirements of life such as working. There is only one moment of nostalgic positivity when they talk about 'Hot-water bottle, God and teddy bear'. These are all things people might cling to in times of pain or need, particularly the hot-water bottle and teddy bear as children. This suggests the speaker can find comfort in life in these small memories of the past. It also implies they found life easier as a child, when they were less responsible. This is reinforced later when the speaker questions 'Who'll kiss my tears away...?' They clearly feel abandoned in life as an adult, and the later word choice of 'distant' to describe how even simple tasks such as getting dressed feel out of reach makes them seem bewildered. The poet may be trying to convey the idea that no one is too old to need help, or to feel afraid. The exaggeration 'there's darkness everywhere' paints a bleak attitude to life, yet the slight adjustment to the refrains which are coupled at the end of the poem shows there is some hope as they repeat 'I must, I simply must' instead of 'can't'.

Page 115 Question 4b

Relevant content may include:

AO2

- comparison of images created across the poems about a bed as a positive/negative place
- use of questions in both poems showing different attitudes
- contrast in use of 'I'/'My' to start sentences in 'Can't' and the absence of them in 'Rain' to reflect different attitudes
- comparison of repetition across both poems, e.g. refrain and individual words
- comparison of vocabulary choices to create specific tones across the poems
- comparison of use of enjambment, end-stopped lines, and line lengths across the poems

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

While the speaker in 'Can't' shows an attitude that life's struggles are overwhelming, the speaker in 'Rain' shows acceptance. This difference is shown by how the poets use questions. While the speaker in 'Can't' wildly throws out undirected questions to the world that go unanswered, 'Who'll kiss my tears away...?', the speaker in 'Rain' challenges themselves, 'Would I live my life over again?' and answers themselves: 'Yes'. This shows that the speaker in 'Rain' has a healthier attitude towards facing life's struggles.

The poets both use the speakers' confinement to their beds as a metaphor for their attitudes towards facing life's struggles. While the speaker in 'Can't' wants to get out, but cannot, 'I must, I simply must get out', the speaker in 'Rain' 'gave over' and chooses to stay in bed. Seth torments his speaker with negative imagery and chooses vocabulary such as 'hate', 'quit', and 'mad', while Carver gives his speaker a positive 'terrific' urge and implies the bed is where the speaker is kept safe, rather than a trap: 'the keep'.

Finally, the poets use structure to show the different attitudes of the speakers. 'Can't' builds a sense of relentless struggle through regular-length, end-stopped lines. 'Rain' uses a mixture of enjambed and end-stopped lines. Consequently, the speaker's attitude towards facing life in 'Rain' is shown to be more relaxed and thoughtful. The speaker takes the reader with them as their thoughts develop. The carefully chosen short, end-stopped sentences are then made more emphatic ('And gave over.' 'Yes.'), showing they feel life ought not to be fought against but embraced and faced.