

**SAMPLE SECTION**

*Experience  
Poetry*

**POEMS AND LEARNING MATERIALS**

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# The Complete Poetry Resource

FOR GRADES 10 & 11

## Poems and Learning Materials for Grades 10 & 11

- Designed to be used over two years (Grades 10 and 11)
- Eclectic mix of inspiring poets from last 500 years
- 26 poems — complete with poet biographies, analyses and questions



**The English Experience**  
Publishers of high-quality educational resources

the **English** experience



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **FOREWORD**

About The English Experience .....	6
Our approach .....	6
Using this resource .....	7

## **INTRODUCTION TO POETRY: MAKING ART WITH WORDS**

Reading and understanding poetry .....	9
Found poetry exercise .....	17
Poetry revision quiz .....	19
Glossary of poetic terms .....	22

## **SECTION 1:**

### **POETIC DEVICES: LINKING LANGUAGE, STRUCTURE AND MEANING**

#### **1.1 Tone, Imagery and Diction**

Colouring with tone .....	24
Exploring imagery .....	27
Dallying with diction .....	29
Exercise 1: Skills Task .....	34
Exercise 2: Poetry Task .....	37
Exercise 3: Creative Task .....	40

#### **1.2 Rhythm and Rhyme**

Rhythm: Pulse of poetry .....	43
Rhyme: Catchy matches .....	46
Meaning behind the music .....	48
Exercise 1: Skills Task .....	49
Exercise 2: Poetry Task .....	51
Exercise 3: Creative Task .....	54

#### **1.3 Structure**

Enjambment: Going with the flow .....	56
Making a point with punctuation .....	58
Exercise 1: Skills Task .....	60
Exercise 2: Poetry Task .....	63
Exercise 3: Creative Task .....	66

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

### 1.4 Sound Devices

Alluring alliteration . . . . .	68
Contemplating consonance and assessing assonance . . . . .	70
Out of the ordinary with onomatopoeia . . . . .	72
Exercise 1: Skills Task . . . . .	72
Exercise 2: Poetry Task . . . . .	73
Exercise 3: Creative Task . . . . .	76

### 1.5 Comparative Devices

Scintillating simplicity of similes . . . . .	79
Making it memorable with metaphors . . . . .	80
Personification with purpose . . . . .	81
Exercise 1: Skills Task . . . . .	82
Exercise 2: Poetry Task . . . . .	84
Exercise 3: Creative Task . . . . .	86

### 1.6 Humour

Satire, parody and caricature: Making a mockery . . . . .	88
Poking pun . . . . .	92
Exercise 1: Skills Task . . . . .	94
Exercise 2: Poetry Task . . . . .	95
Exercise 3: Creative Task . . . . .	98

## SECTION 2:

### ***POETIC FORMS: LEARNING THE RULES, AND THEN BREAKING THEM***

#### 2.1 The Sonnet

Colluding with the classics . . . . .	99
Petrarchan sonnets: The Italian connection . . . . .	99
Shakespearean sonnets: Enter the Bard . . . . .	102
The Bop: A modern twist on a traditional form . . . . .	105
Exercises: The Sonnet . . . . .	108

#### 2.2 The Ballad

It's all about the drama . . . . .	115
Exercises: The Ballad . . . . .	120

#### 2.3 The Lyric

Emoting through melody . . . . .	126
Exercises: The Lyric . . . . .	131

**2.4 The Ode**

Singing your praises . . . . .	136
Exercises: The Ode . . . . .	142

**2.5 The Villanelle**

Beauty in structure . . . . .	149
Exercises: The Villanelle . . . . .	154

**2.6 Free Verse**

Freedom of expression . . . . .	159
Exercises: Free Verse . . . . .	163

## **SECTION 3:**

### **Unseen Poetry**

Going with your Gut: Tips and guidelines . . . . .	168
"The Olympic Runner" . . . . .	171
"An Abandoned Bundle" . . . . .	174
"Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House" . . . . .	177
"Roar" . . . . .	180

## **SECTION 4:**

### **Exercises and Enrichment Tasks**

Flaunting your skills . . . . .	183
"To His Young Mistress" . . . . .	184
"How Do I Love Thee?" . . . . .	188
"Anthem for Doomed Youth" . . . . .	192
"Not Waving But Drowning" . . . . .	195
"Pig Song" . . . . .	198
"Cheetah" . . . . .	202
"My Name" . . . . .	206

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> . . . . .	210
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# Foreword

## About The English Experience

*The English Experience is an independent South African publishing house that specialises in developing high-quality English and Life Orientation educational resources for IEB educators and students. The team of passionate, talented experts behind The English Experience works tirelessly to ensure that every resource encourages insight, growth and debate — enriching and challenging both educators and students — without losing sight of the important goal of examination readiness and success.*

Focused on bringing the subject to life, every resource The English Experience publishes incorporates a range of features — including content and contextual questions and stimulating enrichment materials — designed to encourage a critical appreciation of the subject and to inspire the higher order thinking for which examiners are always looking.

The world-class English Experience team includes highly experienced educators, some with over 20 years of classroom experience, passionate literary experts in various fields, such as historical fiction, poetry and Shakespeare, fanatical historians and researchers, creative writers, skilled editors, pernickety proofreaders and obsessive fact checkers — together with spirited university lecturers and enthusiastic young minds who help to ensure that our approach remains unique and fresh.

While examination readiness and success is a non-negotiable, our aspiration is to inspire a genuine interest in, and love of, English literature.

## Our approach

*Perhaps the toughest challenge in teaching poetry to modern learners is convincing them that the effort often required to grasp the meaning of a poem is worth it. Decoding the language and deciphering the message of a poem can be particularly taxing for students in Grades 8 and 9 so it's perhaps not surprising that many of them see poems as works through which they have to slog in order to earn marks or pass a test.*

This resource has been written with this reality in mind and particular attention has been paid to providing the kind of context and insight necessary to help students engage fully with each poem and to discover for themselves why it has captivated others.

We believe that studying poetry rewards us with a richer, deeper understanding of ourselves and of the world around us. That is why this resource does more than provide students with a thorough introduction to poetic techniques, devices and forms. It focuses on helping students develop the key skills they need to understand and analyse poetry effectively.

Throughout this resource, students are exposed to a unique blend of fresh, contemporary poems and recognised classics — imaginative and illustrative verse that will entertain and inspire, as well as instruct them.

Students are also encouraged to engage with a diverse selection of poems through sets of contextual questions at the end of each section. By formulating and expressing their own responses to these verses, students will be motivated to reflect and grow as individuals, as well as learners.

In the end, we have approached the specific needs of students in Grades 8 and 9 with two, interrelated goals in mind. Our first objective is to ensure that students are thoroughly prepared to tackle the increasing demands of the English syllabus throughout the rest of their school careers. Our second ambition is to inspire a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, the transformative power of poetry and the intrinsic value of the works being studied.



Visit [www.englishexperience.co.za](http://www.englishexperience.co.za) to learn more about The English Experience and the range of educational resources the company publishes. You can scan this QR code to launch the site on your phone automatically. Please note, you will need to have the free 'Tag reader' app installed, which you can download from <http://gettag.mobi>

## Using this resource

*This imaginative, innovative resource is ideal for teaching poetry to students in Grades 8, 9 and 10. Designed to be used exhaustively over this period, it features detailed explanations of all major Figures of Speech, poetic devices and poetry forms, with illuminating examples and skills-focused exercises aimed at honing students' understanding of each topic.*

Exposed to relevant and thought-provoking poems from a wide range of eras, students are guided and encouraged to make the crucial links between form and meaning, and to recognise how the poet conveys mood, tone and intention.

This resource will ensure that students are thoroughly prepared to tackle the increasing demands of the English syllabus throughout the rest of their school careers.

## Chapter structure

Each chapter of this resource introduces a different aspect of poetry and builds on the knowledge and skills gained in the preceding section. Each new concept is defined and explained using example poems and extracts of verse. The chapter concludes with a series of exercises that reinforce the abilities of students through specific skills questions, contextual poetry questions and an imaginative creative task (marking rubrics are included on the companion CD).



## Section 1: Poetic Devices

After an introduction to reading and understanding poetry, the techniques poets use to create vivid descriptions that arrest our senses and stimulate our imaginations are explored in detail, starting with the ways Figures of Speech, imagery and diction are used to create tone, mood and meaning. Next, we wrap our tongues around sound devices, rhythm and rhyme and hear how these make music out of poetry. Section one ends on a lighter note as we have a giggle using humorous devices such as puns, satire and parody and see how poets can use humour to make a more serious point.

## Section 2: Poetic Forms

In section two, the links between poetic form and meaning are traced. The rules of traditional forms like sonnets and odes are exposed, as well as how some poets deliberately break those rules to make a particular point. The beauty of constraint is revealed in the villanelle. The sweet music of the ballad and lyric forms is enjoyed and the section ends with an exploration of the exciting freedom and endless possibilities of free verse.

## Section 3: Unseen Poetry

The unseen poetry section prepares students for tackling poetry they have not come across before. It features edgy, different and inspiring verse from a variety of contemporary sources, challenging questions, and guidelines on how to interpret and explain intricate and original poems.

## Section 4: Exercises and Enrichment Tasks

Designed to test the skills students have mastered while working through the rest of the resource, the final section features a sample of South African and international poems that address the full spectrum of human emotion, from jubilation and admiration to indignation, shame and pain. Each poem includes a short biographical note on its poet, a series of skills-based questions and an enrichment task that allows students to develop and explore their reactions to the verse further (with marking rubrics included on the companion CD as well).

We hope you enjoy using this resource as much as we enjoyed putting it together. If you have any comments, queries or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

### KEY TO USING THE BOXES IN THIS RESOURCE:



#### Definition or Glossary

Provides the meanings of words and terms used in the text



#### Information

Provides additional details or facts about a topic



#### Alert

Something to which you need to pay attention



#### Quirky Fact

Fun, interesting extraneous information



#### Checklist

A list of items or activities required to complete a task satisfactorily



# Introduction to poetry: Making art with words

## Reading and understanding poetry

*Poetry is about experiencing the world around you in new ways. It is about seeing everyday things through a new lens, as though for the first time. The most powerful poems will make you think, feel and wonder. Poetry is emotion so powerful that it can't be expressed in everyday language and experience so intense that it demands to be shared and felt.*

Every poem you encounter is an invitation to take a journey somewhere new. Getting the most out of that journey requires being open to new perspectives and ideas, letting the words capture your senses and immerse you in the world the poem depicts.



*Poetry is about suspending your preconceived ideas and experiencing the world around you in new ways. Dali Atomicus by Phillippe Halsman (1948) (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.)*

## Seeing through the eyes of another

Poets want to challenge you, to shake you out of your everyday haze and to awaken your senses from their bored stupor. As well as wanting to craft something unique and beautiful out of words, poets want you to see through their eyes, feel with their hearts as they try to make sense of life.

**'If they give you ruled  
paper, write the  
other way.'**

— Juan Ramón Jiménez



*Painting of Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1903) (Wikimedia Commons)*

**‘Poetry is an echo, asking  
a shadow to dance.’**

— Carl Sandburg



Self portrait (1904). (Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site)

**‘A good poet is someone  
who manages, in a lifetime of  
standing out in thunderstorms,  
to be struck by lightening five  
or six times.’**

— Randall Jarrell



Randall Jarrell, while in the army (1943)

Understanding the different techniques that poets use to craft their messages will help you to appreciate the meaning of their poems and let you take the journey with them.

Every poet wants to take your hand and show you something. Who knows where you might be led and what you might discover, if you let them?

## Navigating the journey

If the poet’s message is the destination, then his or her words are the journey and, like any trip worth taking, getting there is the best part. **Let your intuition guide you** on the journey and be sure to include a few stops along the way. Take your time and enjoy the scenery.

Before drafting an academic response to a poem, **complete your journey** with the poet. It may have been challenging and you might not have enjoyed every step, but, if you have engaged with a poem and appreciated what the poet is trying to tell you, this will be reflected in the way you respond to it.

The remainder of this section suggests a process you can use to explore any poem and describe how you got to your destination.

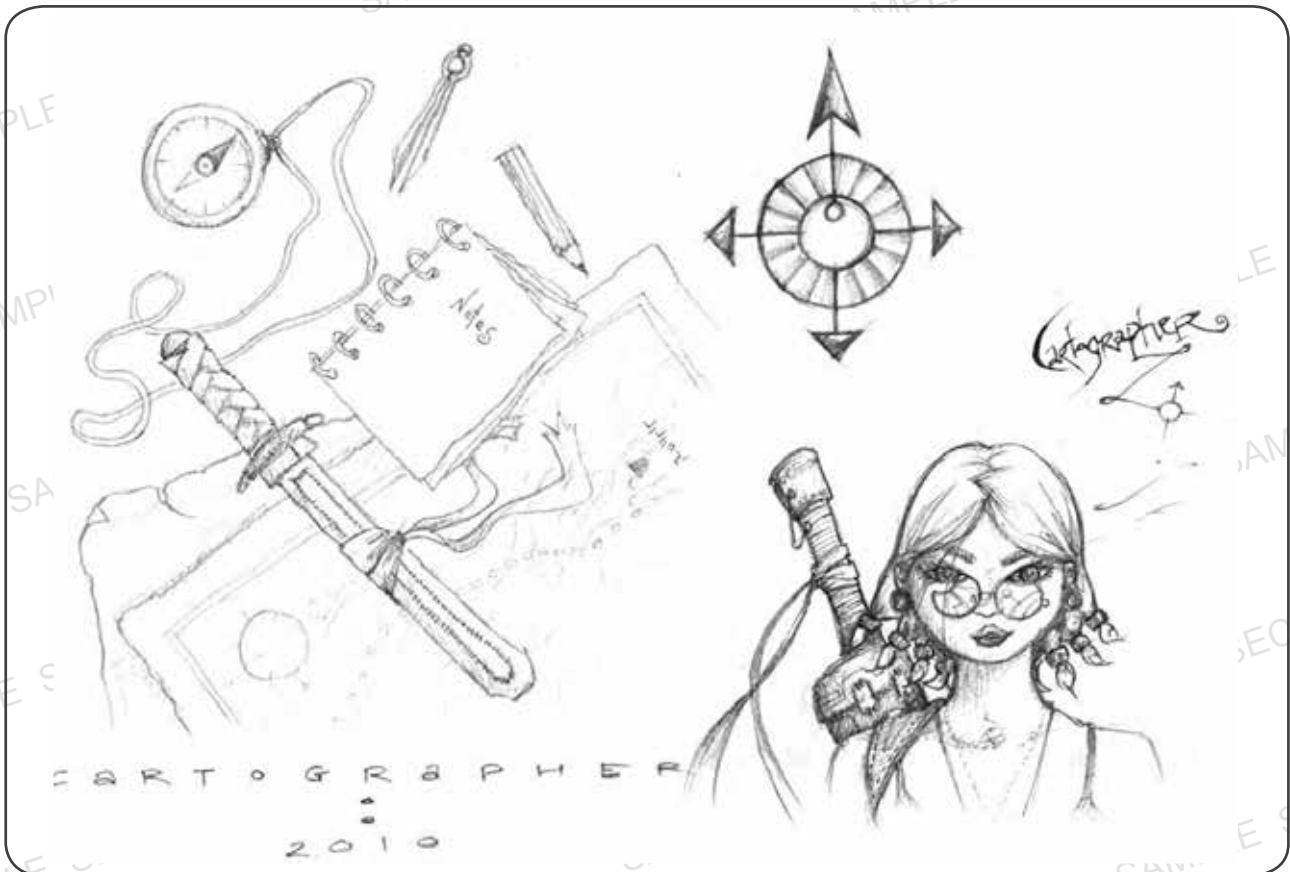


©Calico Feathers



## Reading the map

The lines of verse in a poem are like a map to the poet's destination. Take the time to read through these 'directions' as many times as you need to understand where you are going. The more you read and engage with a poem, the more clearly you will understand it. If you rush into it, you could take a 'wrong turn' early on and reach an entirely different destination to the one the poet had in mind. **Take your time:** the journey is the best part. Be curious, be open-minded, ask questions, and *enjoy* the poem before you even start trying to analyse it.



*The lines of verse in a poem are like a map to the poet's destination. Cartographer by Graham Hannah.*

Simply reading the poem through several times without over-thinking it will help you to process the poet's meaning and techniques more naturally. If you can, **read the poem aloud**, taste the words on your tongue, find patterns of rhyme and rhythm, and hear the music in the poet's words.

The **punctuation** in the poem acts like road signs. Pause where there are commas and full stops and take note of how these pauses influence your understanding of the poem. Poets will often use punctuation to emphasise a particular word or phrase; think about why he or she is drawing your attention to these parts of the poem.

It helps to **create your own art on the page**. Once you have read through the poem a few times, pick up a pencil and read through it again, making notes or marks on the poem this time. Draw pictures, make mind-maps, highlight words or phrases that you love. Let your graffiti help you to interpret and internalise its meaning.

## What's the story?

Once you've read the poem, think about the 'story' of the poem. Ask yourself: what is the poem about? What message is the poet trying to convey? In other words, where is the poet 'taking' you? What does she or he want you to see along the way?

Consider the story of the poem, and then tell yourself that story **in your own words**. Look back over the notes you made on the poem and compose one or two sentences that sum up the **subject** and **theme** of the poem. Together, these make up the 'destination' of your journey.



*If the subject of a poem is a treasure chest, then its theme is the gold.*  
©Snake Oil Magazine



The **subject** of the poem is its *literal* meaning: what it is about, its story or narrative. The **theme** of the poem is its *figurative* meaning: its message, argument or greater significance. If the subject of a poem is a treasure chest, then its theme is the gold. The subject of a poem might be a man grieving the death of his wife and looking back over their life together, for instance, while its theme may be the eternal nature and power of romantic love.

This is also a good time to work out who is behind the 'voice giving you directions' as the **speaker** (the voice) of a poem is not necessarily the poet. The views expressed by the speaker may not be a reflection of the poet's own views. A 'persona' or character might have been adopted in order to tell a particular story or present a certain viewpoint. Just as authors create characters in novels, poets often create characters through which to tell the story of their poems.

The speaker in the poem may not be talking to you directly, either. It could be that you are eavesdropping on the dialogue, much like a 'hitchhiker' who is coming along for the ride. Determine whether the speaker is addressing a specific person or audience in the poem. You'll still enjoy the journey if you are just 'hitching a ride' for a while, but being aware of the **person to whom the speaker is talking** might change your perception of the 'destination' — the meaning or theme of the poem.



It's often important to know something about a poet's context in order to understand his or her poetry. Familiarise yourself with the different **literary periods** and the common concerns or styles of these eras, as well as any major historical events that may have influenced the poets of that era. Take note of the poet's date of birth and think about how his or her world would have been different from the one you know today.



## Pulling over ... and collecting souvenirs

The Figures of Speech and poetic devices that a poet uses are a bit like the souvenirs you collect on a holiday. These add context and meaning to the story of the poem and will help you to remember the experience of reading the verse. Collecting souvenirs from a poem is called a 'close reading'.

Familiarising yourself with the different Figures of Speech and poetic devices will help you to find the most valuable 'gifts' and mementos on your journey. Consider how these different aspects of the poem draw you in, immerse you in the poet's world and help you to understand the message of the poem.



*A souvenir is any object collected and taken home by a visiting traveller. The term brings to mind the mass-produced kitsch that you find in tourist gift shops like the model Eiffel towers pictured, but the true value of a souvenir lies in the memories with which its owner associates it, the invisible psychological connection that gives the object meaning.*

©Ximeg (Wikimedia Commons)

'Pulling over' is the equivalent of slowing down and 'taking in' the poem, spotting things that you might otherwise have missed. Read over the notes and marks you have made on the poem. These are the aspects of the poem that caught your attention along the way and are comparable to the poet showing you the most beautiful or poignant parts of the 'scenery'.

Ask yourself: why did these particular features strike you as effective or interesting? Is the poet using a particular poetic device or Figure of Speech? Why do you think the poet is trying to draw your attention to this particular aspect of the poem?

Once you have dealt with the aspects of the poem that proved most striking to you, return to the beginning of the poem and work carefully through each line, taking note of the more subtle poetic devices and Figures of Speech used by the poet. Again, ask yourself: *why has the poet written the poem in this way?*

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Section 1 of this resource, **Poetic Devices**, will help you to identify and explain the different Figures of Speech and how these work to enhance your experience of poetry and guide you on your 'journey'. The different **Poetic Forms** of poetry, such as sonnets, odes or free verse, are the 'vehicles' that take you to your destination (the meaning of the poem) and will be explored in Section 2.

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

Consider the **connotations** of the words chosen by the poet, particularly any words that seem unusual or particularly noticeable. **Diction** in a poem is carefully chosen by the poet to create a particular effect or impact.



*'Pulling over to take in the scenery' will help you to experience and appreciate the poem as a whole and lessen the chances of your missing something important. Pictured is Sani Pass, one of the most spectacular and notorious roads in the world. The nine kilometre road climbs from Underberg to Mokhotlong in Lesotho and is 2876 metres above sea level at the top. ©Amada44 (Wikimedia Commons)*

**Punctuation** or **typography** may give you further clues about the particular emphasis given to a word or phrase by the poet. A word on its own line, for example, is always significant and the poet is drawing attention to it. **Rhythm** and **rhyme schemes** will also help to create emphasis in particular sections of the poem and change the way in which you read it. Always ask *why* the poet has made these particular decisions, and what effect they have.

Take note of the speaker's **tone** as this will influence the way in which a poem is read. 'Tone' and 'attitude' are synonymous in poetry and will usually be indicated by the use of particular diction, punctuation or typography. This is where **reading the poem out loud** is useful. Typically, the poet will have written his or her poem in such a way that you will naturally adopt a particular tone when reading it.



**Diction** refers to the particular selection of words made by the poet. If you liken the poem to a painting, then diction would be the colours on the artist's palette.



Every word has two levels of meaning associated with it: its **denotation**, which is its dictionary definition, and its **connotations**, which are qualities that we may associate with that word. The word 'red', for instance, denotes a particular colour, while its connotations could be representative of anger, passion, hatred or danger.





**Typography** refers to the layout or 'design' of the poem; the way it looks on the page. Shape poems, for example, are designed to form pictures that reflect the subject or theme of the poem.



Just as every brush stroke on a canvas is carefully considered and deliberately executed by the artist, a poet purposely chooses every word to communicate his or her intended meaning best. Whenever you recognise a specific feature of a poem, your main concern should be determining why the poet has chosen to express him- or herself in that way and the effect that it creates.



## CLOSE READING CHECKLIST

### The basics:

Ensure that you are confident about the following:

- ☒ the subject (what the poem is about)
- ☒ the context (poet's background or literary period)
- ☒ the speaker
- ☒ the tone/attitude
- ☒ the theme or message

### Style and technique:

Determine whether the poet has employed any of the following techniques:

- ☒ particular form or structure (such as a sonnet or ode)
- ☒ unusual diction (word choice) or punctuation
- ☒ striking or unusual typography (layout of the poem)
- ☒ specific rhyme scheme
- ☒ regulated rhythm or meter
- ☒ repetition or other form of emphasis
- ☒ metaphors or similes
- ☒ other Figures of Speech

In an examination or test scenario, you will be required to recognise the different styles and techniques a poet has used and explain how these techniques have helped in communicating the meaning of the poem as a whole.

# Poetic Devices: Linking language, structure and meaning

## Tone, Imagery and Diction

### Colouring with tone

*An artist's palette is smeared with a riot of colour — reds, greens, blues ... and every shade in between. The artist will use those colours to communicate a particular mood on the canvas: streaks of crimson, for example, might communicate an angry, passionate or even violent atmosphere, while cooler blues will create a more soothing, melancholy or even sombre feeling.*

A poet uses **tone** the way an artist uses colour. The tone of a poem is the mood or 'feeling' it evokes when read. It is the atmosphere or attitude that you perceive the poem to have; for example, happy, angry or filled with remorse and regret. Your response to the tone of the poem will, in turn, shape the way in which you interpret its meaning and the intention (purpose) of the poet.



*A poet uses tone the way an artist uses colour. All In A Day's Work by Hannah Dansie.*

### Putting a voice to the words on paper

**Tone** is one of the most important ways in which we communicate with each other. When you are talking to someone, the way in which he or she speaks will suggest how he or she feels about the topic of conversation. Consider how you are able to interpret someone's tone of voice and establish whether he or she is feeling excited, angry, nervous or sceptical.

Imagine you are angry with a friend or sibling and he or she asks you what's wrong, but you do not want to talk about it. You might answer by saying, 'nothing, I'm fine'. Your tone of voice, however, is likely to communicate the fact that you are *not* fine and the other person will recognise that you are irritated, despite what you say.

By communicating a particular attitude or feeling, tone *adds meaning* to our words. It can change the way phrases or



*Russian poster promoting patriotism and giving the working class a voice. "Lengiz books on all subjects!" by Aleksander Rodchenko (1925).*



The tone of a poem is created by several different **poetic devices** working together: diction, imagery, Figures of Speech and form will all influence tone in some way.



sentences are interpreted. A sarcastic tone, for instance, will alert you to the fact that the words should not be accepted at 'face value' (the superficial meaning the words appear to have at first) and that a different or contrary meaning is intended by the speaker.

Tone works the same way in speech and poetry. In poetry, it can be explained as *the style in which the ideas of the speaker are expressed, in order to reveal to the reader the intention of the poet*. You 'hear' the tone of a poem in much the same way as you hear the tone in a person's voice. The poet will use different **poetic devices** (tools and techniques) throughout the verse that will help you perceive the 'feeling' with which she or he intends the poem to be read.



It is important to distinguish between **the speaker** and **the poet** when discussing a poem. The poet is the artist and creator, while the speaker is the persona or character that the poet may adopt, the 'voice' through which the story of the poem is told. Intention and poetic devices belong to the poet, while feelings, emotions and voices belong to the speaker.

## Describing the colours

By describing the tone of a poem, you are explaining *the speaker's attitude towards the subject of the poem*. The way you describe the tone of a poem is very similar to the way in which you describe a person's tone of voice.



### WHY DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE COLOUR?

Do you feel uneasy or nervous in a yellow room? Does the colour blue make you feel calm and peaceful? Artists have long understood that colour can affect our moods, feelings and emotions. Different colours trigger different physiological reactions and, as a result, have developed different symbolic meanings and properties. While these reactions and meanings may vary across cultures and individuals, **colour psychology** is used in a wide variety of ways, from therapy to corporate branding.

In the same way that an artist has the whole spectrum of colours to use, the poet has a whole range of emotions at his or her disposal. A poem can be 'serious' or 'playful', 'romantic' or 'cynical', 'joyful' or 'mournful' and, just as an artist may choose to use several combinations of colours on a canvas, a poet may shift the tone of the verse throughout the poem. This means that one word may not be enough to describe the tone of the poem as a whole.



#### The twist in the tale

Consider the poem as a whole before you decide on its tone because a 'twist' or revelation at the end of the poem may change the way in which you read it.

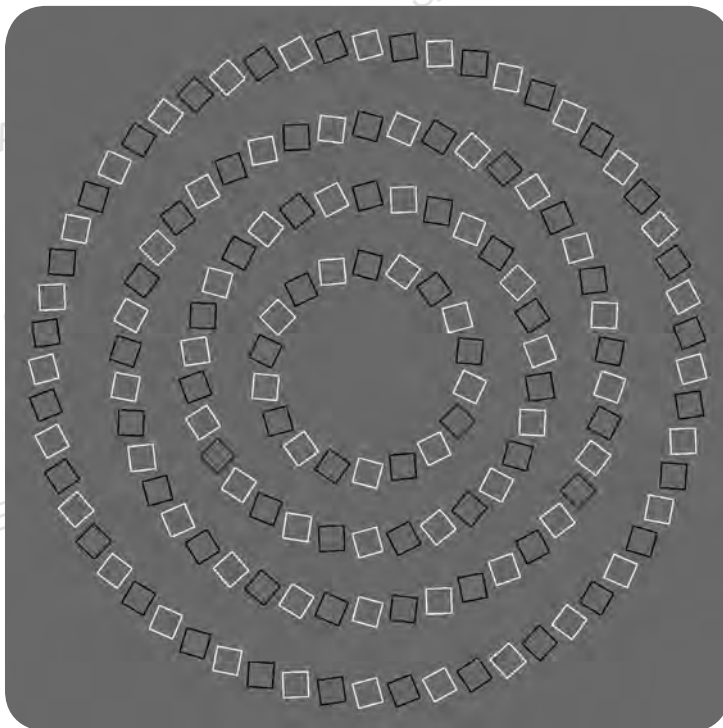
It's useful to memorise as many words that describe tone as possible because having a 'tone vocabulary' will allow your response to the poem to be more specific and sophisticated.

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Words that describe tone can include: admiring, ambivalent, amused, anxious, angry, apologetic, bitter, celebratory, condescending, contemplative, critical, cynical, defensive, defiant, desperate, depressed, determined, disdainful, disgusted, disheartened, dramatic, earnest, enthusiastic, excited, fearful, formal, frank, friendly, frustrated, gloomy, happy, honest, hopeful, humorous, indifferent, indignant, informal, intimate, ironic, irreverent, judgmental, lighthearted, lofty, malevolent, malicious, melancholy, mischievous, mocking, negative, nostalgic, objective, optimistic, patient, patronising, pensive, perplexed, persuasive, pessimistic, reflective, regretful, remorseful, reverent, sarcastic, satirical, scathing, self-pitying, sensationalistic, sentimental, serious, sincere, sceptical, solemn, stiff, straightforward, sympathetic, thankful, threatening, tragic, urgent, vindictive, witty.

### Intertwining mood and tone

Tone and mood are closely linked in poetry, but they are not exactly the same thing. The tone of a poem describes the speaker's attitude towards the subject of the verse, while the **mood** is *the atmosphere or emotions felt by the reader*.



!

In poetry, tone is related to the speaker, while **mood** is all about you, the reader, and how the poem makes you feel.

*While tone and mood are often intertwined in poetry, the two may not be as closely linked as you think; like the circles in this famous illusion, which appear intertwined, but are, in fact, concentric. The Pinna illusion by Dr Baingio Pinna (1990) (Wikimedia Commons)*

A poem is meant to be experienced by the reader. Throughout the poem, the relationship between tone and mood is like a dialogue or exchange between you and the speaker. The tone of the poem (the speaker's attitude) will directly impact on the mood experienced by the reader (the feeling the verse evokes in the reader).

Sometimes, the words used to describe tone and mood can be quite similar. A celebratory tone may, for instance, evoke a happy or joyful mood in the reader. Although tone and mood are not always so closely linked: a sinister or menacing tone may create a fearful mood, for example, while a sarcastic tone might evoke a mood of amusement.

## Mixing the colours to create different shades of tone

There are various techniques that a poet can use to create tone in a poem. It's important to consider the poem as a whole when discussing tone because all the different elements of a poem will work together to convey a particular tone and mood to the reader. Two of the most important ways in which a poet creates tone are through the use of **imagery** and **diction**.

## Exploring imagery

In poetry, **imagery** refers to the mental images or 'pictures' that a poet creates using words. These pictures transport us into the poet's mind, allowing us to see through his or her eyes. Imagery can be dramatic, intense and vivid, leaving you breathless and stunned, or it can be a more subtle, delicate blending of impressions that keeps you engaged long after the final line of verse.

Imagery will appeal to one or more of our **five senses**: sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. When a poet uses imagery, he or she uses our familiarity with our senses to help us 'see' and 'feel' what is being described.

The use of imagery can turn simple statements into expressions of power and beauty. Imagery pulls words off the page and brings them to life. By appealing to the five senses, imagery can draw the reader into the world created by the poet and allow the reader to *experience* the poem, rather than simply passively reading it.



*Imagery will appeal to one or more of our five senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. (Museum Store Association. Denver, Colorado)*

## Making fruitful connections

Consider, for example, the following extract from Alison Croggon's poem "The Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop":

I will go walking in Elwood with my mind as smooth as a  
marrow

[...]

to the Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop:

[...]

for the mangoes are soft yellow thighs and the strawberries are klaxons  
of sweetness



### GLOSSARY

**Elwood** (line 1): a suburb of Melbourne, Australia

**marrow** (line 1): a green-skinned vegetable from the squash family

**klaxon** (line 8): a loud hooter or horn

1

4

8



## EXPERIENCE POETRY

Croggon's poem is an excellent example of the way in which imagery is used to engage the five senses of the reader. Note how the speaker uses **similes** and **metaphors** to describe the sights and sensations that she experiences. The speaker uses vivid descriptions that allow the reader to 'experience' those sensations as well.

**'There is no shame in not  
knowing something.  
The shame is in not being  
willing to learn.'**

– Alison Croggon



©Salt Publishing

In this example, the speaker describes her state of mind as being 'smooth as a marrow' (line 1). The reader pictures the silky, even skin of a marrow vegetable and understands that the speaker is making a **figurative** comparison here: her brain is not **literally** a vegetable, but her even-tempered and calm state of mind is like the smooth, cool skin of the vegetable.

The sense of touch is also evoked, as this line provokes the reader to imagine the feeling of running a finger across the skin of a marrow. The smooth, uniform sensation of the skin of the vegetable that the reader imagines is then transferred to the description of the speaker's mind, which is just as smooth and unruffled. Comparing the speaker's mind to a vegetable is particularly appropriate in this **context** because the speaker is describing her visit to a fruit and vegetable shop.



**Similes** and **metaphors** are both comparative devices. Similes draw comparisons through the use of words such as 'like' and 'as', while metaphors create a more direct comparison. See the section on **Comparative Devices** (p.78) for a more detailed explanation.



The **literal** meaning of a word refers to its basic 'dictionary' or 'normal' definition, while the **figurative** meaning is the exaggerated, metaphorical or altered meaning. If someone tells you that their 'heart is broken', for example, the literal definition would indicate that the organ in his or her chest is physically damaged, but the figurative meaning implies that he or she is overwhelmed by misery or distress because the heart represents or symbolises the place where we feel our emotions.



The term **context** refers to the part of a text (words or phrases) that immediately precedes and/or follows a particular word or statement and clarifies its meaning; for example, a line of verse needs to be understood in the context of the poem as a whole in order to appreciate its meaning fully.

## Engaging the senses

Croggon also uses rich imagery to describe the fruit in the store. She uses a **metaphor** to compare the mangoes to 'soft yellow thighs' (line 8), engaging the reader's senses of sight and touch to illustrate how appetising the fruit is. We know that the mangoes are ripe from the mention of their yellow colour and the comparison to thighs suggests that they are deliciously plump and tender.

The strawberries, meanwhile, are 'klaxons of sweetness' (line 8) and this description encourages the reader to imagine that the burst of their sweet flavour is so intense that it can be compared with the wailing of a loud horn.

In these few lines, the poet has engaged four of the reader's senses: sight (the yellow mangoes), touch (the skin of the marrow and the 'soft yellow thighs'), hearing (the klaxons) and taste (the sweet strawberries). Elsewhere in the poem, she describes the 'poignant [...] fragrance' of the fresh herbs on offer and the reader's nose tingles at the thought.

By bombarding the reader with a sensory overload of sights, smells and sensations, the poet has made the reader feel as though he or she is really there, visiting the fruit and vegetable shop. Note also how the use of rich imagery has allowed the poet to turn a rather boring everyday chore — grocery shopping — into something exciting and extraordinary.



*The Klaxon horn produces a very loud and distinctive 'awooga' sound. It was first fitted to cars in 1908 and was also used for evacuation alarms, factory sirens and even submarine dive alarms.*

©ChelseaDeals

**i**

A poet's use of imagery creates pictures and sensations in your mind, allowing you, as the reader of the poem, to understand better the speaker's attitude towards what he or she is describing. This, in turn, helps you to determine the tone of the poem.

## Dallying with diction

The term **diction** refers to the poet's choice of specific words. An artist thinks carefully and deliberately about every stroke of his brush on the canvas. In the same way, a poet will always put much thought into each and every word he or she uses in a poem. As readers, we must be aware that each choice the poet makes when expressing an idea holds a great deal of significance and will influence the way in which we read a poem.

Every word has two levels of meaning: its **denotation**, which is its dictionary definition or literal meaning, and its **connotations**, which are qualities that we may associate with that word. Most words will only have one or two denotations, but many connotations.

Consider the word 'red', for example. Its denotation simply refers to the colour it defines. Yet its connotations are almost endless. We associate the colour red with love and passion, anger and even hatred. The colour may bring to mind a beautiful sunset or blood and gore.

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

The way in which we interpret the connotations of a word will depend on the context in which it is used and with our personal knowledge of its associations. If a poet refers to a 'blood red sky', for example, we know that he or she is talking about a beautiful sunset. On the other hand, if a poet describes someone as 'seeing red', we know that he or she means that the person is furiously angry.

### Sniffing out the undertones

Diction is often considered to be **positive, negative or neutral**. This refers to the associations and feelings we may connect with a particular word. Consider, for example, the following set of words:

Smell — fragrance — odour

All three of these words refer to the same thing: a sensation that we can detect using our noses. Yet we associate different connotations with each of these words.

'Smell' is a neutral word and we will usually use this to describe any sort of scent, good or bad, that we can perceive. 'Fragrance' has a positive connotation and we are usually referring to a pleasant scent or perfume when we use it. 'Odour', by contrast, has a negative connotation and refers to something pungent or unpleasant.

If a poet was to use one of these three words to describe a scent, each would influence the way in which we interpreted his or her subject. In a love poem, for instance, the poet's speaker would be more likely to refer to his ladylove's scent as a 'fragrance' than an 'odour', especially if he is trying to woo her.

Diction may also be described as **formal** or **informal**. A poem with formal diction — that is, strictly grammatical, 'proper' language — is more likely to be serious in tone and subject. Informal diction is conversational and creates a sense of familiarity between the poet's speaker and the reader. It is more likely to be fun, humorous or light-hearted in tone.

There are various Figures of Speech associated with the use of diction. Some of the most prominent include: **hyperbole, allusion, oxymoron** and **paradox**.

### Hyperbole

**Hyperbole** magnifies things out of proportion. It is a deliberately over-exaggerated statement that is not meant to be understood literally. We often use hyperbole in everyday language. Instead of simply saying 'I am hungry', for example, you might say 'I could eat a horse'. This does not mean that you would literally consume an entire horse, but rather that you are just extremely hungry.

A poet will use hyperbole to create impact and communicate a point more effectively. Hyperbole is often used in love poetry, when the speaker is exaggerating the depth of his love or the many beautiful qualities that he admires in his lady. Consider, for example, this extract from Andrew Marvell's poem, "To His Coy Mistress":



[...]

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;

Two hundred to adore each breast

15

But thirty thousand to the rest;

An age at least to every part,

And the last age should show your heart.

For, lady, you deserve this state,

Nor would I love at lower rate.

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The opposite of hyperbole is called **understatement**, where the poet purposefully plays down or undervalues the descriptions of his or her subject.

In this poem, the speaker is addressing the woman he is trying to seduce and telling her that, if he had an eternity to woo her, he would spend hundreds of years describing the perfection of each part of her body. Marvell does not intend this to be understood literally; his speaker is simply telling the woman that she is so beautiful that it is impossible for any poetic description to do her justice.

## Allusion

**Allusion** occurs when a writer refers to another text, place, person or event that has happened. Usually, the writer won't refer to the subject of the allusion directly, but rather hint at it subtly by using imagery, words or phrases commonly associated with it. If a poet is referring to something that is greatly desired, but not allowed he or she may describe it as 'forbidden fruit', for example, which is usually an allusion to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

For an allusion to be effective and appreciated, the reader needs to have some knowledge of the person, text or place to which the poet is alluding. It is similar to a kind of *déjà-vu* — as you remember the text, event or thing to which reference is being made, the knowledge and associations you already have help you to understand the poet's meaning and what the speaker is expressing. Consider the following lyrics from the song "Desolation Row", by Bob Dylan:



Still of Bob Dylan from the promotional film clip (the precursor to the modern music video) for Don't Look Back, a documentary about the American songwriter and singer. (1967) (Docurama Films)

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

[...]

Cinderella, she seems so easy

'It takes one to know one,' she smiles

And puts her hands into her back pockets

Bette Davis style

15

And in comes Romeo, he's moaning

'You belong to me I believe'

And someone turns and says to him

'My friend you'd better leave'

20

[...]

Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood

With his memories in a trunk

Passed this way an hour ago

With his friend, a jealous monk

50

In these lines, Dylan alludes to several different well-known people, both real and imagined. These include characters from folklore, Cinderella (line 13) and Robin Hood (line 49); the American actress Bette Davis (line 16); the lovelorn character of Romeo from Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* (line 17); and the famous scientist Albert Einstein (line 49).

The song, as a whole, is Dylan's commentary on urban decay and chaos, and the listener's understanding of his message is dependent on his or her knowledge of the characters and events in history to which Dylan alludes.

### Oxymoron and Paradox

An **oxymoron** is a Figure of Speech that combines two apparently contradictory terms within one phrase.

Shakespeare was particularly fond of **oxymora**: in *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, he uses the terms 'loving hate' and 'sweet sorrow'. While these phrases may appear contradictory, they are, in fact, very descriptive. Juliet feels 'sweet sorrow' when she parts from Romeo because she is sad to be apart from him and yet also happily in love and excited about marrying him the next day.

i

The plural form of the word oxymoron is **oxymora**.



Have you ever felt alone in a crowd? ©Ruths138 (Flickr)

A **paradox** is a statement that, at first, seems to be contradictory or illogical, but proves to be true when it is considered more carefully. It's often a very effective way of making the reader consider something in a new and unusual light. A speaker in a poem, for example, may describe herself as being 'alone in a crowd'. This does not really make sense at first: how can you be alone when you are among many other people? If, however, the reader considers this statement carefully, it becomes clear that the speaker is referring to her emotional rather than physical state: even though she is surrounded by people, she cannot connect with them on an emotional level and feels lonely as a result.

Consider the following passage from Act 3, Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, where Juliet has just found out that her new husband, Romeo, has murdered her cousin Tybalt:

[...]

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!

Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?

Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!

75

Dove-feather'd raven! wolfish-ravens lamb!

Despised substance of divinest show!

Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,

A damned saint, an honourable villain!

O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell,

80

When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend

In moral paradise of such sweet flesh?

Was ever book containing such vile matter

So fairly bound? O that deceit should dwell

In such a gorgeous palace!

85

Juliet is expressing her confusion and violently mixed emotions. She is deeply in love with Romeo and believes him to be gentle, kind and loving; however, she has just been told that he has killed her beloved cousin and, naturally, she is devastated.

An example of a paradox is found in the lines 'Was ever a book containing such vile matter / So fairly bound?' (lines 83-84). Here, she is wondering how such a handsome, gentle man could possess a temperament so violent as to commit murder.



## GLOSSARY

**fair** (lines 74 and 84): beautiful

**tyrant** (line 75): a cruel and overbearing person

**fiend** (lines 75 and 81): an evil demon or spirit

**angelical** (line 75): resembling an angel

**raven** (line 76): a black bird, like a crow

**wolfish-ravens** (line 76): hunts like a wolf

**justly** (line 78): exactly

**bower** (line 81): enclose inside



## EXPERIENCE POETRY

A similar sentiment is expressed in the oxymora in this passage, including 'Beautiful tyrant!', 'fiend angelical!' (line 75), 'A damned saint' and 'an honourable villain!' (line 79). All of these descriptions support Juliet's point that Romeo is 'Just opposite to what [he seemed]' (line 78).



A **paradox** is a statement that appears illogical or contradictory at first, but may actually point to an underlying truth, for example, 'the beginning of the end'. An **oxymoron** is a descriptive phrase that combines two contradictory terms, such as 'living dead' or 'beautiful disaster'.

## Exercises: Tone, Imagery and Diction

### Exercise 1: Skills Task

1. Identify whether the following statements are examples of **hyperbole**, **allusion**, **oxymoron** or **paradox**, and provide a clear explanation of its meaning in each case.

1.1 'I've told you a million times to clean your room!' her mother shrieked. (2)

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1.2 The poet George Bernard Shaw proclaimed, 'What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young.' (2)

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1.3 Barack Obama once joked, 'I was not born in a manger. I was actually born on Krypton and sent here by my father, Jor-el, to save the Planet Earth.' (2)

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- 1.4 'Did you not get any sleep last night?' she asked her friend. 'You look like the walking dead today.' (2)

- 1.5 Oscar Wilde famously declared: 'I can resist anything but temptation.' (2)

- 1.6 Her rendition of Beethoven's violin sonata was painfully beautiful. (2)

- 1.7 'If you keep lying like that, your nose will start to grow,' his grandmother warned. (2)

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

1.8 'I died of shame when my brother read my diary,' she moaned. (2)

2. Rewrite each of the following statements to make it **hyperbolic**.

2.1 My sister is very intelligent. (1)

2.2 I had the best holiday in Durban last December. (1)

2.3 Nelson Mandela was a great leader. (1)

2.4 I read a beautiful poem yesterday. (1)

2.5 I like to play my music at a high volume. (1)

3. Arrange the following groups of words in the table that follows by identifying which term carries a positive, negative or neutral connotation.

- Group a) scrawny; lean; thin (3)
- Group b) young; childish; energetic (3)
- Group c) laid-back; inactive; lazy (3)

	Neutral	Positive	Negative
Group a)			
Group b)			
Group c)			

[30]



## Exercise 2: Poetry Task

1. Consider the poem “Lost Generation” by Jonathan Reed, and answer the questions that follow:

### “Lost Generation”

I am part of a lost generation.  
 And I refuse to believe that  
 I can change the world.  
 I realise this may be a shock, but  
 ‘Happiness comes from within’  
 Is a lie, and  
 ‘Money will make me happy.’  
 So in thirty years, I will tell my children  
 They are not the most important thing in my life.  
 My employer will know that  
 I have my priorities straight because  
 Work  
 Is more important than  
 Family  
 I tell you this:  
 Once upon a time  
 Families stayed together  
 But this will not be true in my era.  
 This is a quick fix society  
 Experts tell me  
 30 years from now, I will be celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my divorce.  
 I do not concede that  
 I will live in a country of my own making.  
 In the future,  
 Environmental destruction will be the norm.  
 No longer can it be said that  
 My peers and I care about this Earth.  
 It will be evident that  
 My generation is apathetic and lethargic.  
 It is foolish to presume that  
 There is hope.

And all of this will come true unless we reverse it.

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

- 1.1 Identify the speaker's tone in the poem, and explain how you are able to do so. (3)

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- 1.2 How does the tone of this poem impact on its mood? (2)

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- 1.3 Now read the poem again, except this time do it backwards, starting with the final line and reading up towards the first line. How do the tone and mood of the poem change when it is read this way? (3)

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2. Read the following extract from TS Eliot's poem "Preludes", and respond to the questions that follow:

### "Preludes"

The winter evening settles down

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With smell of steaks in passageways.

Six o'clock.

The burnt-out ends of smoky days.

And now a gusty shower wraps

5

The grimy scraps

Of withered leaves about your feet

And newspapers from vacant lots;

The showers beat

On broken blinds and chimney-pots,

10

And at the corner of the street

A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

[...]

- 2.1 Using your own words, and in as much detail as possible, describe the scene that is portrayed in this extract from the poem.

(3)

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- 2.2 Identify one example from the extract of a description that appeals to your sense of touch, and explain why you find it effective.

(2)

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## EXPERIENCE POETRY

- 2.3 Explain the impact created by the imagery used by the speaker in line 4, 'The burnt-out ends of smoky days'. (3)

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- 2.4 Identify a synonym in the poem for the word 'dirty'. (1)

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- 2.5 Re-read lines 9 to 12, and explain how imagery is used by the speaker to convey a particular tone. (3)

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[20]

## Exercise 3: Creative Task

1. Choose one of the human emotions listed below and **compose your own imagery poem** using it as the subject. Engage all five of your reader's senses in your poem by describing how your chosen emotion looks, feels, tastes, sounds and smells. Let your imagination run wild and take your reader on a sensory journey with you.

**Choose from the following emotions:** happiness, anger, love, loneliness, frustration, fear, delight, horror, excitement, grief, triumph.

*Marks will be awarded for the creative, innovative use of imagery that reflects the tone suggested by the chosen emotion. Poems should engage the five senses of the reader and, in doing so, convey an appropriate mood.* (15)

Anxiety is  
waiting  
Anxiety is

Anxiety is  
that  
Anxiety is

... is a throbbi

Anxiety is a c

demerit

[illegible]

20 horizontal lines for writing poetry.



# The Lyric

## Emoting through melody

*The urge to pen a verse is often prompted by the stirrings of strong emotion, such as love, hate, anger, passion, grief or rage, and a poem that explores the complexities and strengths of emotion is called a lyric poem. These feelings are among the most powerful experiences we may have in our lives, but they are also notoriously difficult to describe.*



*Can you identify all six emotions depicted by these masks?*

©Melody Anderson

up to a dramatic climax. Lyric poetry, on the other hand, focuses on emotion, revealing the innermost thoughts and feelings of the speaker, rather than telling a story.

Lyrics are usually shorter than ballads and told in the first person. The speaker will often address readers directly, whispering his or her darkest and most personal secrets in your ear. Lyric poetry is therefore very intimate, allowing you to feel as though the speaker is a friend who has just revealed his or her true self to you.

Like the ballad, the lyric has a long poetic history. The ancient Greeks and Romans composed lyrics that were accompanied by a musical instrument.

**Lyrics** are similar to ballads, in that these also feature a melodic meter and are often written in the form of a song, accompanied by instruments. Both lyrics and ballads take you on a melodramatic journey of tragedy or exultation, often leaving you breathless and your pulse beating. Yet there are a few notable differences between ballads and lyrics as well. Ballads are narrative poems: telling us a story, involving characters and dialogues, and usually build



*Lyric poetry is often intimate and reads as if the speaker is whispering his or her darkest and most personal secrets in your ear.*

Lyric poetry continued to be popular in Europe throughout the medieval era and it was the most dominant poetic form in the English language by the Romantic period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its popularity then waned slightly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was taken up once more by 'confessional' feminist poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, in later decades.



As its name suggests, lyric poetry was originally composed to be accompanied by a lyre, a small stringed instrument similar to a harp. Pictured is an artist's impression of Nero, the Roman Emperor who loved to sing in public while accompanying himself on the lyre. ©Roger Payne

**'What horrifies me most is the idea of being useless: well-educated, brilliantly promising, and fading out into an indifferent middle age.'**

— Sylvia Plath



The lyric is not an 'exclusive' form of poetry. Its definition is quite broad and a poem written in the form of a sonnet or ode, for instance, can also be considered as a lyric. A sonnet that focuses on the emotions of the speaker could be referred to as a lyrical sonnet, for example.



### LYRIC CHECKLIST

- ☒ A highly rhythmic, song-like meter
- ☒ Regular rhyme scheme
- ☒ Explores the emotions, innermost thoughts or state of mind of the speaker
- ☒ Usually quite short
- ☒ Usually in the present tense and first person

## A baring of innermost emotions

Consider the following poem by 19<sup>th</sup> century English writer, Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton:

### “I Do Not Love Thee”

I do not love thee!—no! I do not love thee! 1

And yet when thou art absent I am sad;

And envy even the bright blue sky above thee,  
Whose quiet stars may see thee and be glad.

I do not love thee!—yet, I know not why, 5

Whate'er thou dost seems still well done, to me:

And often in my solitude I sigh  
That those I do love are not more like thee!

I do not love thee! —yet, when thou art gone,  
I hate the sound (though those who speak be dear) 10

Which breaks the lingering echo of the tone  
Thy voice of music leaves upon my ear.

I do not love thee! —yet thy speaking eyes,  
With their deep, bright, and most expressive blue,  
Between me and the midnight heaven arise, 15  
 Oftener than any eyes I ever knew.

I know I do not love thee! yet, alas!  
Others will scarcely trust my candid heart;  
And oft I catch them smiling as they pass,  
Because they see me gazing where thou art. 20

In “I Do Not Love Thee”, the speaker explores her **feelings for a lover**, denying her attraction to him, while, at the same time, acknowledging all the signs that contradict her words: she misses her lover when he is gone, wishes others were more like him, and thinks of his voice and his blue eyes. In the final stanza, she continues to insist that she is not in love, but says that no-one believes her and that people smile when they catch her gazing after her lover.



*If he is dumb enough to walk away, be smart enough to let him go.*



“I Do Not Love Thee” is an example of a lyric poem as the speaker is baring her innermost emotions to the reader. She denies that she is in love, but she is implicitly revealing that her denials are untrue. This suggests the depth of the secret that she is sharing. She seems unwilling to admit it to herself and yet is entrusting the reader with it. Unusually for a lyric poem, the speaker is not addressing the reader directly, but rather her lover.

Also unusually for a lyric poem, there is no regular meter discernable in the poem; the melodic rhythm is created by the regular rhyme scheme instead. Notice that each stanza follows a rhyme scheme pattern of ABAB, creating the sing-song effect typical of lyric poetry. The highly emotive language and regular stanzas are also characteristic of the lyric form.

### Contemporary lyrics: love, romance and heartbreak remain popular

Today, recording artists and songwriters often adapt the traditional lyric form when producing modern music. Love, romance and heartbreak have always been the most popular subjects of both poetry and music and the lyric form is the perfect vehicle to express these deep, often turbulent emotions. Consider the lyrics of “It Will Rain” by American singer-songwriter Bruno Mars:

If you ever leave me, baby, 1  
 Leave some morphine at my door  
 'Cause it would take a whole lot of medication  
 To realise what we used to have,  
 We don't have it anymore. 5

There's no religion that could save me  
 No matter how long my knees are on the floor  
 So keep in mind all the sacrifices I'm makin'  
 To keep you by my side  
 To keep you from walkin' out the door. 10

'Cause there'll be no sunlight  
 If I lose you, baby  
 There'll be no clear skies  
 If I lose you, baby  
 Just like the clouds 15  
 My eyes will do the same, if you walk away  
 Everyday it'll rain, rain, rain.

I'll never be your mother's favourite  
 Your daddy can't even look me in the eye  
 If I was in their shoes, I'd be doing the same thing 20  
 Sayin', 'There goes my little girl  
 Walkin' with that troublesome guy.'

## EXPERIENCE POETRY

But they're just afraid of something they can't understand  
Ooh, but little darlin' watch me change their minds  
Yeah for you I'll try, I'll try, I'll try, I'll try  
I'll pick up these broken pieces 'til I'm bleeding  
If that'll make you mine

25

'Cause there'll be no sunlight  
If I lose you, baby  
There'll be no clear skies  
If I lose you, baby  
Just like the clouds  
My eyes will do the same, if you walk away  
Everyday it'll rain, rain, rain.

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Though written almost 200 years after Norton's poem, Mars' song is similar in many respects: it also directly addresses the speaker's lover and expresses **deeply-felt love and emotional turmoil**. The most noticeable difference is that each artist approaches the establishment of melody through different techniques. Norton relies on a regular rhyme scheme; Mars, however, does not rhyme his verse, but rather relies on meter to create the rhythm of his song.

Even without the accompanying music, it is possible to hear the rhythm of "It Will Rain". If we were to scan the first two lines of the song, we can clearly see the trochaic meter that is used:

If you| ever| leave me,| baby,|  
Leave some| morphine| at my| door

The **trochaic meter** of these lines immediately establish the rhythm of the song. Both Norton's poem and Mars' song demonstrate the melodic quality that defines the lyric poem.



©Brothers Le (Flickr)

**'To write ...  
you must have  
an imagination,  
to have an imagination,  
you must be free.'**

— Bruno Mars

## Exercises: The Lyric

1. Read “Ashes of Life”, by Edna St. Vincent Millay, and respond to the questions that follow:

### “Ashes of Life”

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike; 1

Eat I must, and sleep I will, — and would that night were here!

But ah! — to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike!

Would that it were day again! — with twilight near!

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do; 5

This or that or what you will is all the same to me;

But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through, —

There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me, — and the neighbors knock and borrow,

And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse, — 10

And to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow

There's this little street and this little house.

- 1.1 What does the title of the poem suggest about its theme, and what the reader may expect from it? (2)

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- 1.2 What features of this poem allow us to identify it as a lyric? (4)

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## EXPERIENCE POETRY

1.3 Discuss how the poet has created rhythm in the poem. (3)

1.4 Comment on the poet's use of punctuation and how it conveys the speaker's tone, using examples from the poem to illustrate your points. (4)

1.5 Identify the Figure of Speech in line 5, and comment on its effect in context. (2)

**[15]**

2. Read “I Sit and Think” by JRR Tolkien, and answer the questions that follow:

### “I Sit and Think”

I sit beside the fire and think of all that I have seen, 1

of meadow-flowers and butterflies in summers that have been;

Of yellow leaves and gossamer in autumns that there were,

with morning mist and silver sun and wind upon my hair.

I sit beside the fire and think of how the world will be 5

when winter comes without a spring that I shall ever see.

For still there are so many things that I have never seen:

in every wood in every spring there is a different green.

I sit beside the fire and think of people long ago,

and people who will see a world that I shall never know. 10

But all the while I sit and think of times there were before,

I listen for returning feet and voices at the door.



*'I sit ... and think of people long ago,  
and people who will see a world that  
I shall never know'. ©Graham Crumb  
(Wikimedia Commons)*

- 2.1 In three sentences, paraphrase what the speaker is contemplating through the course of this poem. (3)

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## EXPERIENCE POETRY

2.2 How would you describe the theme of this poem? (2)

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2.3 Scan the first two lines, indicating with the correct symbols the stressed and unstressed syllables in these lines. (2)

*One mark will be awarded for each line that demonstrates the correct placement of stressed and unstressed syllables.*

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2.4 Based on your answer in 2.3, how would you describe the meter of the first two lines? (2)

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2.5 What features of this poem allow us to identify it as a lyric? (4)

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- 2.6 State whether you believe the speaker is a young or elderly person, citing evidence from the poem to support your answer. (2)

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**[15]**



# Unseen Poetry

## Tips and guidelines

*Unseen Poetry exercises present you with a unique opportunity to be moved, uplifted and even transformed by the power of the new and unfamiliar verse. When you encounter a poem for the first time, without being told what to expect from it by a teacher or textbook, the verse has more chance of being able to surprise, startle and challenge you. You are likely to be more open to the fresh perspectives and new ideas the poem may contain.*

Unseen Poetry exercises give you the chance to explore your personal ‘gut response’ to the verse. Free from the opinions and ideas of others, the ‘journey’ on which an unfamiliar poem takes you is entirely your own. It is *your* reaction and *your* response to the verse that count and you will be rewarded for a unique, well-substantiated interpretation.

Not knowing where a poem might take you makes for an exhilarating expedition. It also allows you to ‘flex your poetic muscles’ as you make sense of, interpret and explain an intricate and original text — a skill you will use in many different situations throughout your life.

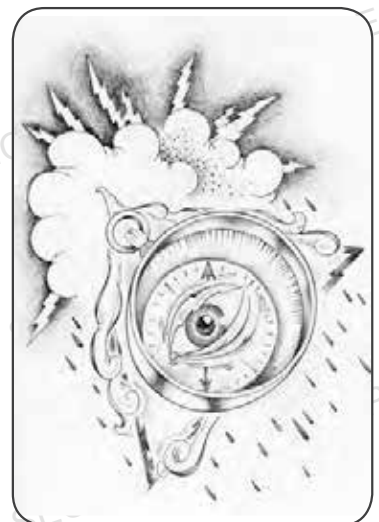


This guide to unseen poetry should be used together with the notes on pages 9-15, ‘Making Art With Words: An Introduction to Poetry’.

## Charting your path

### Detecting the clues

- Before you begin, take a moment to **consider the title** of the poem and what it is telling you. The title is always your first point of contact and will often point you to the purpose the poet had in mind when writing the poem. Remember that titles may be satirical or ironic and be open to this possibility.
- If the unseen poem has a **companion piece** — perhaps another poem, a popular song or a visual that you may be asked to compare it with — then use this for clues as to the theme(s) of the unseen poem.
- The **poetic genre** chosen by the poet will often provide clues as to his or her intentions or themes. If the word ‘ode’ appears in the title, for instance, the poem will praise someone or something; if the title contains the word ‘ballad’, there will be a story element to consider.
- Take note of the **name of the poet**. You may be familiar with other poems by the same writer and this could help you understand his or her particular style.



*The journey on which an unfamiliar poem takes you is entirely your own. It is your reaction and response to the verse that counts.*

©Sue Van Gageldonk

- If the dates of birth and death of the poet are provided, consider the **literary movement** to which they belonged. If the poet lived and wrote between 1800 and 1870, for example, then it is likely that he or she was part of the Romantic Movement and wrote verse that focused on the glorification of the individual, the emotions and the imagination.

## Taking in the 'scenery'

- A poem is about the *experience*, the journey on which it takes you, so **take it all in**. Relax and read through the poem several times so that you are familiar with all aspects of the poem.
- **Read the footnotes and glossary**, if provided, as these will clear up any obscure words or phrases and may give you extra contextual meaning.
- **Make your own notes** on the poem. Underline curious or difficult words, phrases and Figures of Speech. Jot down thoughts as they come to you.
- **Write a short paraphrase** of the poem. Decide on its central idea or theme and the poet's reason for writing it.

## A journey of discovery

- As you read, remain attentive to the way in which the **mechanics of the poem** work; for instance, punctuation and line breaks that indicate groupings of thoughts/ideas.
- If **unusual phrasing or syntax** is proving difficult for you to decipher, identify the subject of a sentence and then its verb to help clarify meaning.
- **Read through the questions** as these will provide you with further clues as to how to interpret the poem. A point you may not have understood is sometimes made clearer by the questions and this may help you see the poem in a different light.
- **Focus on the diction.** A poet chooses words with the utmost care and thought: for their specific meanings and connotations, for the way they sound and for the pictures they paint in the mind of the reader.



Be alert to the pictures the words paint. Taylor Momsen ©Medicated-Kitty (Deviantart.com)

## Describing your experience

- When answering the questions, **work in rough first**. Reread the sections of the poem on which the question indicates you should focus, asking yourself whether your interpretation makes sense when the poem is considered as a whole. If it does, then you are ready to write your final answers.
- Your **creative interpretations are encouraged**, provided that you can (i) prove your point by quoting from the text and (ii) the poem still forms a consistent and meaningful whole (in the light of your interpretation).

## Comparing different works of art

- You may be asked an **intertextual question** in relation to the unseen poem. An intertextual question will ask you to compare the poem with another text, which might be a different poem, an image or visual, even a cartoon. The companion text will not be randomly chosen. There will be some relationship or similarities between the two texts, which you will be asked to explore.
- Often, the two texts will feature two **different or even opposing views** on a similar subject or theme. Be conscious of the tone of each text and of any particular viewpoints or opinions that are being expressed.
- When answering intertextual questions, make sure that you **draw on both texts** for evidence to support your answer.

## Avoiding common potholes

- **Misinterpretation:** Weigh up all the evidence being presented to you by the words and imagery of the poem carefully. Look for the 'pointers' provided by the poet regarding his or her perspective and intended meaning.
- **Arbitrary answers:** The poet had a clear idea of where he or she was going. The poem does not present the reader with a set of disconnected or aimless concepts. Your answers should indicate that you have understood the central ideas of the poem. If your responses do not fit the context, rethink or discard them, regardless of how clever they seem in isolation.
- **Careless oversights:** Carefully consider key Figures of Speech and obvious mechanical features like the use of monosyllables, run-on lines, the isolation of a word on a line, and the



*Open your heart and mind, think creatively and let the poem speak to you. Not knowing where a poem might take you makes for an exhilarating expedition. 'Sailing Through Time' ©Erin Hammill Young (Deviantart.com)*

use of rhyme or the lack thereof. Everything that you learnt when you analysed seen poetry will apply to unseen poetry.

- **Leaving out questions:** Attempt to answer all the questions. The questions that seem tougher will present you with an opportunity to be creative and to dig deeper.
- **Unnecessary anxiety:** Keep calm and approach the poem positively, adopt an 'I can do this' attitude. Open your heart and mind, think creatively and let the poem speak to you.

## “The Olympic Runner” by Jacinta Ramayah (20th century)

The sun beat down so hard it burnt his back, 1  
 His feet ate the dust as he ran the endless track,  
 The wind gave him wings and the miles flew by,  
 He was gunning for gold, for victory he'd die.

Critics had a field day when he entered the arena, 5  
 They could have knocked him down with a feather,  
 'Sideways you can't see him through a 50-cent coin,  
 Bones on a cold carcass make up his manly loin.'

'His feet so long he will surely fall flat on his face,  
 Legs stretch down like two bamboo poles in place, 10  
 From the land of famine he gets not his daily bread,  
 If he wins, we'll eat our hats,' in mockery they said.

As he touched the finish line, the crowd went wild,  
 Cheers heard across the land by every man and child,  
 His heartbeats so erratic they were beating out of time 15  
 If he could take a shot at his critics it'd be no crime.

Sweat streamed down, pooled like rivulets on the floor,  
 A warrior back from the battlefield, battered and sore,  
 Standing tall as a Brobdingnagian, the anthem sung  
 The joy so sweet, he could taste it on his tongue. 20

He was so tired he felt he could sleep for a year  
 The cynics struck dumb, had no cause to jeer,  
 'A man in a million' was the headline that day  
 'Not a mere man but a giant in spirit,' they say.





## GLOSSARY

**loin** (line 8): side of the body

**famine** (line 11): food scarcity  
or shortage

**rivulets** (line 17): streams

**Brobdingnagian** (line 19): giant

**jeer** (line 22): mock, abuse



## Questions

1. In your own words, define the term 'stereotype', and explain how the poem makes use of stereotyping to convey its message. (4)

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2. Describe the rhyme scheme of this poem. (2)

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3. Identify and explain one example of the use of hyperbole in the poem. (2)

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4. Explain what it means to have 'a field day' (line 5), and comment on the speaker's use of a pun in this line. (3)

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5. Identify and explain the effect of the Figure of Speech in line 10. (3)

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6. Provide a synonym for the word 'erratic' (line 15). (1)

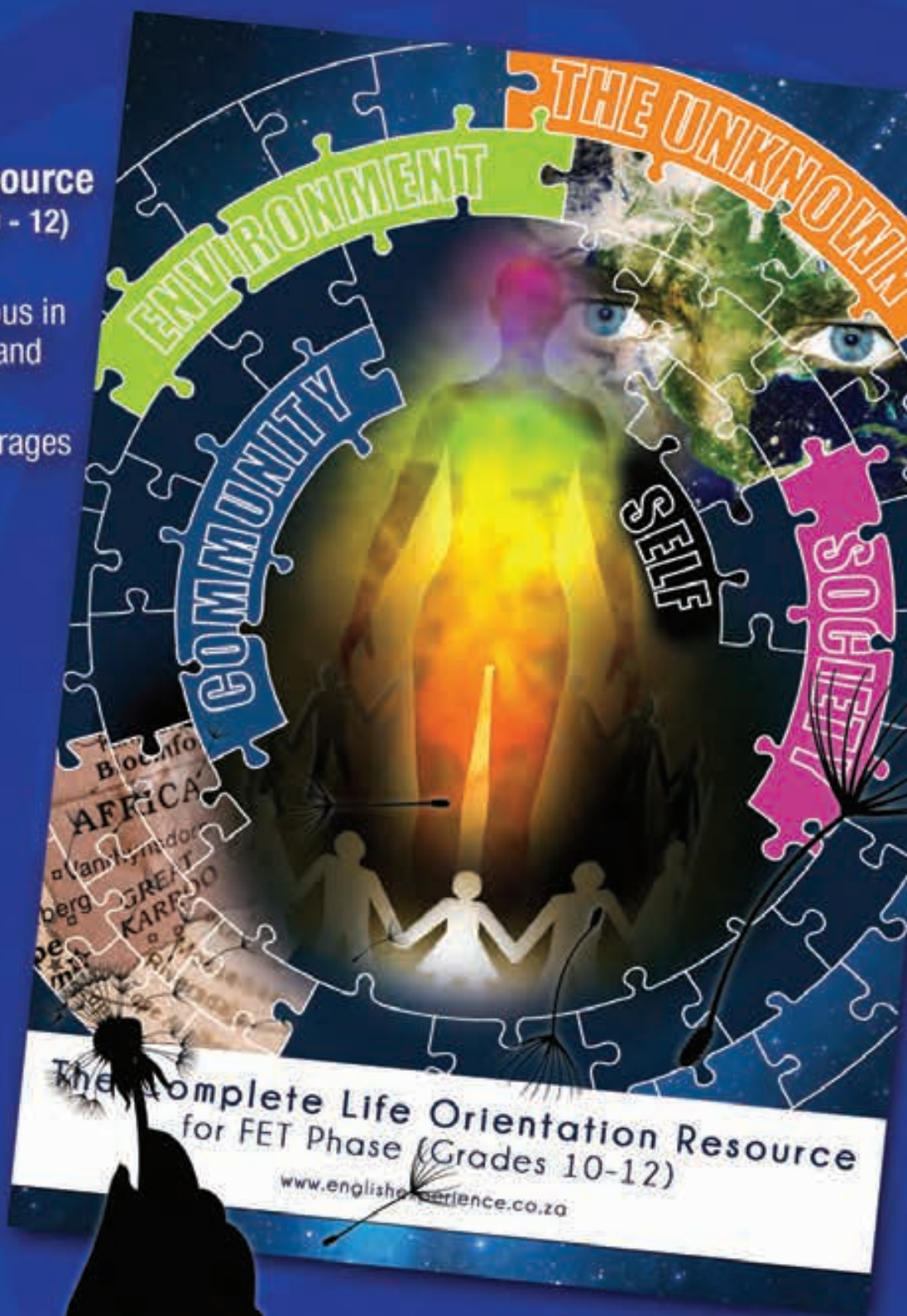
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[15]

## The Complete Life Orientation Resource for FET Phase (Grades 10 - 12)

- Approaches the syllabus in relevant, appropriate and inspiring manner
- Sparks debate, encourages personal growth and enrichment



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