

Reading poems from other cultures: 1. Typical questions and comparing poems

This audio bite is about typical questions and comparing poems.

ALIX: When you are doing the poetry section in the exam, pick which question you do carefully. You won't have studied all the poems – they are divided into two groups and most classes just study one group. So go for poems you know. The question will usually tell you one of the poems you should write about, and let you choose the second one. Like this:

ELIOT: Compare the ways in which poets describe a place in Blessing, and in one other poem.

ALIX: So you need another poem in mind which deals with place. It sounds difficult. But there are lots to choose from. For example, Presents from My Aunts, or Nothing's Changed, or Hurricane Hits England. In fact, the whole set of poems is about different places. So you shouldn't struggle too much. And then the question usually has some bullet points, like this:

ELIOT: Write about what you are told about the places, the language used to describe these places, and what the poets think about the places.

ALIX: You should answer these questions. They are really meant to help you – so instead of guessing what to write about, you know you should say something about the place, about the language in the poems and about the poets' attitudes – what they think.

ELIOT: So if you chose Nothing's Changed, you could write about how the place was full of weeds, but in the middle there were two places – a cheap café and an expensive restaurant. You'd give all the details about these three, then write about language.

ALIX: For instance, the poet uses lot of contrasting words to describe the places, such as the 'single rose' in one, and the 'spit' on the floor in the other. He also repeats the word 'glass' or 'pane' to show the invisible barrier between people.

ELIOT: And finally you'd deal with his attitude – he's angry and he can't see that it's going to change soon. Now that's a very quick version – you'd have to write a bit more than that. You'd also have to compare it with the other poem.

ALIX: You can compare the two poems as you go along – if you were writing about the first point, you'd add that in Blessing, the place is very different. It's very dry but also full of life when there is water.

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ELIOT: You don't have to compare as you go along – you can write the bullet points about the first poem, and then compare it with the second. Both ways are fine.

ALIX: You need to look for things which are similar, so use words like 'and, also, both, like', and 'similarly'.

ELIOT: And look for things which are different, so use words like 'but, unlike, however,' and 'alternatively'. There is more information about individual poems in other audio clips, and you can also look at the GCSE Bitesize website for extra ideas.

ALIX: So pick your question carefully, making sure it's a poem you know and an idea you can answer. You should write about a second poem, so again make sure it's one that has something to say about the question.

The bullet points are a guide to help you, so answer them all. Make sure you compare the two poems, looking for anything which seems the same, and anything which is different.

There are more ideas in the other audio revision bites.