Prescribed Poetry

Approaching the essay
There are 50 marks for this section.

You should allow 45 / 50 minutes to write your prescribed poetry essay.

Choose four to five poems which are relevant to the question.

You are making a case in your essay, so you must have a thesis. The examiner is not interested in reading a re-hash of your poetry notes.
Remember...

- Themes
- Style
- Personal response
Organisation

- If you simply choose four or five poems and discuss them in no particular order, you will get a low grade.
Order

- Your thesis should be the thread that holds your essay together
Some suggestions

- Move from poems written about the poet's childhood to poems written about middle age or old age.

- Move from poems written when the poet was young to poems written when he/she was an older person. (This approach works well for Yeats.)

- Move from positive to negative or vice versa.

- Move from personal to public or vice versa.
Final Touches

- Think of links between the poems and fine-tune your plan.
Structure

- There is no hard and fast rule here; use whatever structure has worked for you in the past.
- Introduction: Refer to the question and outline your approach
- Two paragraphs on each poem
- Link sentence at the start of each new poem
- Conclusion: it is good to end on a quote if possible
Yeats: Approaching the Essay

- 'Yeats' poetry is driven by a tension between the real world in which he lives and the ideal world that he imagines.'
Thesis

- This tension is at the heart of Yeats' poetry
- Longing to be at one with nature
- Struggling to come to terms with ageing
- Disillusionment with contemporary Ireland
- Admitting reality of 1916 rising is far from the ideal
- Always expresses himself with passion and strength of conviction
- Sweeps us along with him as he constantly reinvents himself
- Adjusts his opinions to reflect the changing reality in his personal life and the social and political turmoil of his native land

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The Lake Isle

Natural perfection
Romantic ideal
'Hateful' London
Overwhelming longing
'I hear it in the deep heart's core'
The Wild Swans

- Change in opinion
- Nature is now a symbol of what he has lost
- In 'The Lake Isle' he longed to be alone beside a lake, but now the reality does not bring him joy.
Sailing to Byzantium

- Now rejects nature completely in favour of art and civilisation
- His heart is 'sick with desire and fastened to a dying animal'.
- Dichotomy between reality and imagined ideal
- Wants to be 'gathered into the artifice of eternity'

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Changing imagery

- Progression of bird imagery is interesting
- Lake Isle: linnet is part of the imagined ideal
- Wild Swans: birds are reminders of all he has lost; 'their hearts have not grown old'
- Sailing to Byzantium: 'birds in the trees' are part of reality which Yeats has utterly rejected
- He now wishes to be a golden bird upon a bough
...set upon a golden bough to sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come...

Sailing to Byzantium

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September 1913

- Not just in his personal life that Yeats expresses tension between reality and an imagined ideal
- Rails against the merchant classes
- Patriots of old represent a sort of heroic ideal
- 'delirium of the brave'
Easter 1916

- Palinode

- Oxymoron: 'a terrible beauty' - Yeats attempts to reconcile heroic idealism and bitter reality of violence and death
Conclusion

- Anniversary of 1916 nearly upon us
- Will modern commentators view these patriots as an ideal whose likes will not be seen again?
- Part of the human condition to strive for and dream of better things
- Yeats' vision resonates with us

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