

Section Two: Poetry [60]

QUESTION TWO (30)

Answer **EITHER 1 OR 2** which follow.

N.B. In answering you may **NOT** use the poem given on this paper. You must give the title of any poem and the name of the poet you refer to in your answer.

1. From the poetry you have studied, choose a poem that appeals to you in which the poet deals with a particular theme or message.
 - (a) Describe what the poet has to say in the poem and explain why it appeals to you. (15)
 - (b) What techniques did the poet use to enhance the appeal of what he/she has to say in the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem. (15)

OR

2. Poetry offers us an opportunity to explore places we have never seen and people we have never met. Choose a poem you have studied which deals with an interesting person, subject or experience.
 - (a) Explain what the poet has to say in this poem. Support your answer with reference to the poem. (15)
 - (b) Describe how the poet's use of language and imagery heightened your understanding of the poem. Support your answer with reference to the poem. (15)

Note: The most important things are: a) to know your chosen poems inside out – and that includes liberal and accurate quotation – and b) to make certain that every single paragraph in your answer relates directly to the question asked.

Sample Answer to Question 1

Option A: Using W.B. Yeats' 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree':

(As we will be using this poem in the sample answer, I have printed it out for you.)

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats

Question 1: From the poetry you have studied, choose a poem that appeals to you in which the poet deals with a particular theme or message.

(a) Describe what the poet has to say in the poem and explain why it appeals to you.

Plan for (a):-

Poet talks of escape; we can all relate to that

Simplicity of life he describes is appealing

Sustaining vision is positive message

When I saw this question, I did not have a moment's hesitation in picking W.B. Yeats' 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. Of all the poems I have studied for my Junior Cert course, this stands out because it deals with the longing to escape reality and travel to a perfect world of peace and natural beauty.

Your introduction must name the poet and the poem. If you can weave these into a sentence or sentences which directly answers the question, so much the better.

The theme of this poem appealed to me immediately. Yeats longs to escape the hustle and bustle of London and flee to the tranquil, natural perfection of an island on Lough Gill in his native Sligo. While the details of our day-dreams might be different, the poet's idea is one to which I can certainly relate. After all, what student has not fervently wished that he or she could escape busy classrooms or study halls and be transported to a place so peaceful that the sounds of nature could be clearly heard? Instead of the shouts of teenagers and the rumble of traffic outside, wouldn't it be wonderful to be on Yeats' Lake Isle where the buzzing of bees would seem loud and the whirring flight of tiny songbirds would make the evening appear 'full of linnet's wings'?

Yeats' ideal is centred on nature and a simple life where he will live in a 'small cabin ... of clay and wattles made', and will need nothing more to sustain him than 'nine bean rows' and 'a hive for the honeybee'. In an overly-materialistic age when we are constantly under pressure to keep up with the latest and greatest developments in technology and remain constantly in contact with others on social media, I think we would do well to consider taking a little time out and thinking about what is really important in life. We may not have the chance to 'live alone in the bee-loud glade', but perhaps we could switch off for a little while at least. This, I think, is a thought-provoking and appealing aspect of the poem.

Every point should link directly to the question. The last sentence in a paragraph can be a good place to reinforce this.

Yeats is not happy at the time of writing; he has no desire to be 'on the pavements grey' and is filled with longing for the idyllic Isle of Innisfree. I can certainly relate to the wistful tone in this poem and it makes me feel connected to the poet, even though he died long before I was born. However, the poem is not depressing. It is, above all, a celebration of Yeats' favourite place. His vision

sustains him when he is homesick, and this is a very positive message. It makes me think that I too should focus on the good things in life and, like him, have somewhere special to which I can escape when I feel under pressure. I find the idea of having somewhere that you feel 'in the deep heart's core' a most attractive idea.

- (b)** What techniques did the poet use to enhance the appeal of what he/she has to say in the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

Plan for (b):-

Effective use of imagery – 'veils of morning'

Musical qualities add to the sense of peace

Structure: rhyme scheme and switching tenses adds to sense of peace/ longing

This poem is filled with beautiful imagery and musical qualities which bring Yeats' vision to life for us and help us to understand the depth of his desire to escape to his peaceful island haven.

The first phrase which brought the Lake Isle to life for me is in the second stanza. The metaphor describing the mist at daybreak as 'the veils of morning' is most effective in capturing the gentle haziness of the start of another serene, perfect day on Innisfree. I can easily imagine the dew dropping slowly, like peace itself, from those gauzy veils and the vision is such an attractive one that I can easily understand why Yeats would want to spend time here rather than on 'the pavements grey' of London.

Remember that the question asked you about the poet's techniques, so be sure to use poetic terminology in your answer.

Another image which caught my eye and made me appreciate the utter tranquility of the island is when Yeats says that the evening is 'full of the linnet's wings'. I thought this was a most unusual idea as I would have expected the poet to mention the bird's song rather than the noise its wings makes as it flies. However, when I thought about it, I found that this description actually conjured up an even more peaceful scene than a description of birdsong ever could. The reason for this is that I was forced to think about how quiet it must be on the island if the whirr of this little bird's wings can fill the air. The poet's

clever reversal of my expectations ensured that I engaged with his vision and thought about it more carefully than I otherwise might have done.

Remember that you should never comment on a feature of style without using a verb or verbs to say what effect it has on you.

The musical quality of the language in this poem transports me to the Lake Isle and makes me share Yeats' longing for it. In the final stanza, Yeats is recalled again to the present but says that his longing for the island is with him 'night and day'. He says that when he is standing 'on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,' he hears deep within him, 'lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore'. The soft, alliterative 'l' and 's' sounds emphasise the tranquility of the scene, while the repetition of the consonants also mirrors the repetitive motion of the water as it gently moves forward and back. This assonance, combined with the fact that the vowel sounds are broad, again reinforces the slow pace of life on the island.

Yeats' description of the Lake Isle is so wonderfully evocative that I can understand why it was a place he carried always 'in the deep heart's core.'



Sample Answer to Question 1

Option B: Using Seamus Heaney's 'The Early Purges':

(As we will be using this poem in the sample answer, I have printed it out for you.)

The Early Purges

I was six when I first saw kittens drown.
Dan Taggart pitched them, 'the scraggy wee shits',
Into a bucket; a frail metal sound,

Soft paws scraping like mad. But their tiny din
Was soon soused. They were slung on the snout
Of the pump and the water pumped in.

'Sure, isn't it better for them now?' Dan said.
Like wet gloves they bobbed and shone till he sluiced
Them out on the dunghill, glossy and dead.

Suddenly frightened, for days I sadly hung
Round the yard, watching the three sogged remains
Turn mealy and crisp as old summer dung

Until I forgot them. But the fear came back
When Dan trapped big rats, snared rabbits, shot crows
Or, with a sickening tug, pulled old hens' necks.

Still, living displaces false sentiments
And now, when shrill pups are prodded to drown
I just shrug, 'Bloody pups'. It makes sense:

'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
Where they consider death unnatural
But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.

Seamus Heaney



Question 1: From the poetry you have studied, choose a poem that appeals to you in which the poet deals with a particular theme or message.

(a) Describe what the poet has to say in the poem and explain why it appeals to you.

N.B. This answer could equally easily be used to answer Question 2 as it describes an interesting experience.

Plan for (a):-

*Poem is about loss of innocence – I can relate to this / harsh realities of growing up
Recalls an incident that made profound impression on him – appears indifferent
now to same issue – interested me to see his changing viewpoint
I believe he is pretending to be tougher than he is – this is revealing*

Of all the poems we studied for our Junior Certificate exam, it was Seamus Heaney's 'The Early Purges' which appealed to me the most. While it made me feel uncomfortable and upset at times, it is unforgettable and provides much food for thought.

Remember, even a poem about something sad or upsetting can appeal to you. You must say why this is the case in your opening paragraph.

In 'The Early Purges' Heaney recalls an incident from his childhood in which he saw a worker on his family farm drowning unwanted kittens. The young poet is only six when the events of the poem take place, but this moment marks the beginning of his loss of innocence. He is deeply upset to see the suffering of the animals as their 'soft paws' scrape like mad on the bucket until water is pumped in and their 'tiny din' is ended. Although it is difficult to read of the little boy's sorrow, growing up and realizing the world is not perfect is something all of us must go through and for that reason the theme resonated with me.

Each paragraph should answer the question. The first or last sentence in the paragraph can be a good place to do this.

Another aspect of the poem which interested me was the message that although the poet was deeply affected by the incident and felt that 'fear come back' when Dan Taggart disposed of other unwanted animals, in time he came to share Dan's view that such killings were necessary. I was intrigued to think that the little boy who 'sadly hung' around the kittens' decomposing bodies for days could

grow into a man who would 'just shrug' when 'shrill pups are prodded to drown'. It made me wonder if as I grow up, I will change my viewpoint to fit in with the harsh realities of life.

Ultimately, though, what fascinated me the most about 'The Early Purges' was the possibility that Heaney is not as tough as he might appear and that adults may sometimes force themselves to go along with viewpoints they don't necessarily agree with. Heaney may claim to have nothing in common with the 'false sentiments' of city people who decry animal cruelty, but his writing of this poem so long after the event proves that it had an emotional impact on him.

Notice the way I have used phrases like '...resonated with me', 'I was intrigued to think...' and 'what fascinated me the most was...' All of these are ways of saying that the poem appealed to me. By using a variety of phrases, I show the examiner that I have sufficient vocabulary to avoid repeating myself.

- (b)** What techniques did the poet use to enhance the appeal of what he/she has to say in the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

Plan for (b):-

Horror of kittens' death vividly described – boy's youth highlighted

Dan Taggart's cursing and false consolation – poet distances himself from it and is still upset

Adult Heaney now sounds like Dan – cursing and clichés do not ring true - very interesting to observe this

The language in this poem adds greatly to its appeal as it shows us the way the poet changes from a frightened young boy to a man who knows he must appear tough.

If you have time to write one, a brief introduction can help to show the examiner the direction your answer will take.

One of the reasons I find this poem so memorable is that the death of the kittens is described so vividly. The verbs used to describe the way Dan Taggart

handles the kittens show his casual cruelty: they are 'pitched' into the bucket which is in turn 'slung' on the pump and once they are dead they are afforded no dignity but are 'sluiced' out onto the dunghill. The words used to describe the kittens highlight their vulnerability; there is a 'frail' sound when they are thrown into the bucket, their 'soft paws' scrape the bucket and their cries are a 'tiny din'.

Another way Heaney draws us into this experience from his past is by bringing the figure of Dan Taggart to life. He is not just a faceless farm hand; we know his name and that makes him appear more real to us. Heaney also gives Dan a voice: he calls the kittens 'scraggy wee shits' and tries to console the boy by saying 'Sure, isn't it better for them now?' The direct speech here serves another purpose; it shows that the sentiments expressed are Taggart's alone. The young boy cannot share the man's views and is 'Suddenly frightened' by this insight into the cruelty and unfairness of the world.

The language in the last two stanzas is very interesting indeed. Now Heaney sounds just like Dan Taggart; when 'shrill pups are prodded to drown' he just shrugs and curses, 'Bloody pups'. However, I don't believe he really thinks this way. The cursing and the clichéd expressions like 'cuts ice' and 'on well-run farms pests have to be kept down' don't sound at all like the language in the rest of the poem. I think this shows Heaney is merely repeating words he has heard others use over the years and I do not believe he agrees with them.

Your opinion is as valid as anyone else's provided you can support it with evidence from the poem.

I believe that Heaney's clever use of language ensures that the poem is as hauntingly memorable for us as the original 'Early Purges' were for him.



Sample Answer to Question 2

Option A: Using Patrick Kavanagh's 'In Memory of My Mother':

(As we will be using this poem in the sample answer, I have printed it out for you.)

In Memory of My Mother

I do not think of you lying in the wet clay
Of a Monaghan graveyard; I see
You walking down a lane among the poplars
On your way to the station, or happily

Going to second Mass on a summer Sunday--
You meet me and you say:
'Don't forget to see about the cattle--'
Among your earthiest words the angels stray.

And I think of you walking along a headland
Of green oats in June,
So full of repose, so rich with life--
And I see us meeting at the end of a town

On a fair day by accident, after
The bargains are all made and we can walk
Together through the shops and stalls and markets
Free in the oriental streets of thought.

O you are not lying in the wet clay,
For it is harvest evening now and we
Are piling up the ricks against the moonlight
And you smile up at us - eternally.

Patrick Kavanagh

2. Poetry offers us an opportunity to explore places we have never seen and people we have never met. Choose a poem you have studied which deals with an interesting person, subject or experience.

(a) Explain what the poet has to say in this poem. Support your answer with reference to the poem. (15)

In Patrick Kavanagh's 'In Memory of My Mother' we are presented with a very vivid, interesting and wonderfully affectionate portrait of the poet's late mother.

Kavanagh's mother is portrayed as a down-to-earth, sensible, cheerful, spiritual woman. The poet remembers her walking happily to 'second Mass on a summer Sunday' and, when she meets her son on the way, reminding him not to forget about the cattle. All Kavanagh's memories of his mother are positive ones. She is walking along a headland, shopping in the market or 'smiling up' at her son as they work together to bring in the harvest.

In this poem, Kavanagh does not just give us a picture of his own mother, but of all mothers. I think the line that conjures up the clearest picture of the poet's mother is in the second stanza, when he gives her a voice and remembers her telling him not to 'forget about the cattle'. This is such a practical and sensible thing to say, and so reminiscent of all mothers who seem to be continually reminding their children not to forget to do various chores that I could almost hear her speaking the line aloud.

I think that the main message of this poem is that we should appreciate our loved ones and treasure the time we spend with them.

This bond is so strong, however, that even when they are gone, we may gain some comfort from seeing them in our mind's eye – as Kavanagh does – smiling up at us 'eternally'.

If a question asks you what the poet has to say in the poem, you would be expected to mention the theme.

- (b)** Describe how the poet's use of language and imagery heightened your understanding of the poem. Support your answer with reference to the poem.

This poem is rich with words and phrases which bring Kavanagh's mother to life for us. The first thing that struck me when reading the poem was that the poet uses the present tense throughout, which makes me feel that his mother is not in his past but is very much alive in his mind and in his heart. Although she may be 'lying in the wet clay', the poet does not want to imagine her that way and dwells instead on happier thoughts of their time together.

It is always worth paying close attention to the tenses used in a poem. For example, when you read 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', you should be aware of the switch between future and present tenses. Ask yourself why the poet does this.

In the first and second stanza, the poet describes his mother walking to 'second Mass on a summer Sunday'. The detail – 'second Mass' – makes this description realistic, and the sibilance throughout this line both evokes a sense of peace and reinforces the idea that the poet's mother is going 'happily' on her way. The fact that the poet remembers a summer's day rather than a winter's one again brings his mother to life as that is a time of year connected to growth and new life.

Always comment on the effect of the feature of style you are discussing.

In the third stanza, the poet once again connects his mother to growth and to life as he remembers her walking along a headland near a field of oats on a June day. The line which tells us that he sees her 'so full of repose – so rich with life' is very powerful. The words 'full' and 'rich' and show just how vividly the poet sees his mother in his mind's eye. This is no vague memory, but one which is so strong that we are enabled to share in it.

The most moving image in the poem is that in the last line. Kavanagh refuses to think of his mother as a dead body in the wet soil, but instead sees her helping to bring in the harvest and smiling up at him 'eternally'. We are left with a clear picture of a loving mother who watches over her son forever.

Although Kavanagh's mother died long before I was born, she will live forever in his poem and will be brought to life as vividly for each new reader as she was

for me. I am reminded of the words of William Shakespeare in another poem I studied this year, in which he talks of the power of words to keep a loved one alive:

*'So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.'*

Students sometimes worry that an examiner will not like it if they mention another poem. The opposite is true. If you see links between poems – as I did in this case between 'In Memory of My Mother' and 'Shall I Compare Thee?' – then it is perfectly valid to point that out. Be careful not to overdo it, of course, and ensure that the main focus of your answer is the poem you have selected.