

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

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'

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

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

