

YORK NOTES for GCSE

STUDY GUIDE

New for GCSE (9–1)

NEW EDITION
with complete
annotated poems



LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

AQA POETRY ANTHOLOGY



YORK NOTES



LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED ON MY WORK ON *LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS*?

When studying the cluster, your work will be examined through these three Assessment Objectives:

Assessment Objectives	Wording	Worth thinking about ...
A01	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response ● use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How well do I know what happens, what people say, do, etc. in each poem? ● What do I think about the key ideas in the poems? ● How can I support my viewpoint in a really convincing way? ● What are the best quotations to use and when should I use them?
A02	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What specific things do the poets 'do'? What choices has each poet made? (Why this particular word, phrase or image here? Why does this change occur at this point?) ● What effects do these choices create – optimism, pessimism, ambiguity?
A03 *	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What can I learn about society from the poems? (What do they tell me about stereotypes and prejudice, for example?) ● What was/is society like for the poets? Can I see it reflected in their poems?

***A03** is only assessed in relation to the cluster, and not in relation to the 'Unseen' part of the exam (see **Part Six: Approaching 'unseen' poems**).

In other parts of your English Literature GCSE a fourth Assessment Objective, **A04**, which is related to spelling, punctuation and grammar, is also assessed. While you will not gain any marks for A04 in your poetry examination, it is still important to ensure that you write accurately and clearly, in order to get your points across to the examiner in the best possible way.

Look out for the Assessment Objective labels throughout your York Notes Study Guide – these will help to focus your study and revision!

The text used in this Study Guide is *Past and Present: Poetry Anthology* (AQA, 2015).

HOW TO USE YOUR YORK NOTES STUDY GUIDE

In this York Notes Study Guide you will find the text of every poem in the cluster, fully annotated, plus over 20 pages of detailed analysis of themes, contexts, structure, form and language. There are special sections on comparing poems and the 'unseen' part of your exam, three sample practice papers, and annotated sample answers at three different levels.

So how will these Notes help you study and revise? Here are some suggestions:

- **A step-by-step study and revision guide** – work through the poems in Part Two to help you study them, then use the analysis sections to focus your learning. Finally, hone your exams skills and practise for the exam.
- **A 'dip-in' support** – know the cluster quite well already but want to check your understanding and practise your skills? Look for the section you think you need most help with, and go for it!
- **A revision guide before your exam** – use Parts Two to Four to check your knowledge, then work through Parts Five to Eight as you revise for your exam.

Short and long questions to test your knowledge and understanding

FORM, STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE PART FOUR

PROGRESS AND REVISION CHECK

SECTION ONE: CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Answer these quick questions to test your basic knowledge of the themes and contexts of the poems.

- 1 What **extended metaphor** is used in 'Climbing My Grandfather'?
- 2 Who speaks in a rural **dialect**, and in which poem?
- 3 The Petrarchan sonnet has two **quatrains** (or an **octave**) and what other verse form?
- 4 In which poem does the following image occur: 'globed like a full sail strung' – and what does it refer to?
- 5 In what **metre** is 'Sonnet 29 – "I think of thee!"' written?
- 6 What does a caesura do?
- 7 Where is the **sibilant** in the following: 'we skirted the lake, silent and apart' – and where does the quotation come from?
- 8 Where does **internal rhyme** occur?
- 9 What is **cadence**?
- 10 In which poem does the image of the 'God-curst' sun appear, and what does it represent?

SECTION TWO: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Here is a task about the imagery the poet uses. This requires more thought and a longer response. Try to write at least three to four paragraphs.

Task: How does Owen Sheers show that love can be renewed in 'Winter Swans'? Think about:

- What poetic technique the poet uses
- What effects are created through the technique

PROGRESS CHECK

GOOD PROGRESS

I can:

- Explain how the poets use key poetic techniques to shape the poem, show relationships and develop ideas.
- Use relevant quotations to support the points I make, and make reference to the effect of some techniques.

EXCELLENT PROGRESS

I can:

- Analyse in detail the poets' use of particular techniques to convey ideas, create a voice or viewpoint and evoke mood or setting.
- Select from a range of evidence, including apt quotations, to infer the effect of particular techniques and to develop wider interpretations.

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Self-evaluation – so you can keep a record of your progress

Every poem annotated with lots of useful ideas and interpretations

ANDREW WATERHOUSE: 'CLIMBING MY GRANDFATHER' PART TWO

Viewpoint: The first person speaker, a grandson, explores the nature of his grandfather by imagining how he would climb up him.

Theme: The climb may be dangerous, bringing back upsetting memories when remembering his grandfather, suggesting memory as a theme.

Language: Suggests the grandfather worked outside or cared little about his appearance.

Climbing My Grandfather

Structure: The climb/exploration of memory begins energetically, at the grandfather's feet/foot of a mountain.

I decide to do it free, without a rope or net.
First, the old brogues, dusty and cracked:
an easy scramble onto his trousers,
pushing into the weave, trying to get a grip.

Key technique – metaphor: Suggests both the 'grip' on the mountain and an attempt to recover an image of the grandfather, suggesting childhood as a theme.

Context: Waterhouse had a special knowledge of landscape, which is reflected in the landforms mentioned.

By the overhanging¹ shirt I change direction, traverse along his belt² to an earth-stained hand. The nails are splintered and give good purchase, the skin of his finger is smooth and thick

Language: Helps to build a picture of the grandfather as working on the land.

Key technique – oxymoron: The contradiction suggests that though the grandfather is dead, he is kept alive through the speaker's love.

10 like warm ice. On his arm I discover the glassy ridge of a scar³, place my feet gently in the old stitches and move on.

Language: 'gently' reveals the speaker's care and respect for his grandfather.

Language: Suggests a childhood memory of the grandfather's reliability and strength.

At his still firm shoulder, I rest for a while in the shade, not looking down,

Key technique – extended metaphor: The grandfather is compared to a mountain and its features throughout the poem (e.g. 'scar').

Language: Suggests there was affection between the speaker and his grandfather

15 for climbing has its dangers, then pull myself up the loose skin of his neck to a smiling mouth to drink among teeth.

Language: Suggests there are dangers in recalling memories, reinforces line 4.

Sound – sibilant: The soft 's' enhances the gentle exploration of the grandfather's eyes, searching for who he is.

Refreshed, I cross the screed⁴ cheek, to stare into his brown eyes, watch a pupi slowly open and close. Then up over the forehead, the wrinkles well-spaced and easy, to his thick hair (soft and white at this altitude), reaching for the summit, where gasping for breath I can only lie

Language: Reminds us of children's fascination with faces.

Structure – resolution: The exhausted climber has achieved his goal, and has become closer to his grandfather through searching his memory.

25 watching clouds and birds circle, feeling his heat, knowing the slow pulse of his good heart.

Theme: Conveys the strong love felt for the grandfather.

Andrew Waterhouse (1958–2001)

Glossary

¹ overhanging = jutting rock formation

³ belt = a group of mountain ranges

² scar = a bare, protruding rocky place

⁴ screed = a level layer

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Glossary of difficult words

PART TWO: EXPLORING THE POEMS

HOW TO READ AND STUDY A POEM

When you read and study a poem, or a set of poems, there are a number of key areas you will need to explore. These will ensure you enjoy your reading and study, and equally importantly, engage with the poem so that you can respond intelligently and thoughtfully.

KEY ASPECTS TO CONSIDER

As with any text, the secret to exploring the poem on the page in front of you is to consider its ingredients: the particular elements that create meaning or impact on you as a reader. These will include:

- 1 What the **narrative** of the poem is – its story, or the experience it describes

For example, does the poem describe something particular that happens? Is it a personal story or a public one? What actually happens? (Sometimes poems don't seem to tell a story at all, but all poems are about *something*, however small or apparently insignificant.)

- 2 The **voice** (or voices) and **viewpoint**

For example, is the poem told in the first person, and is the voice intimate or distant? Who does it address?

- 3 The '**message**' and/or **theme** of the poem – its concerns

For example, what is the main idea running through the poem? Are there other, related ideas?

- 4 The poem's distinctive **language features**, or **poetic techniques** used by the poet

What method or skills does the poet use to create effects? For example poets often use **enjambment** because it carries the thought on from one line to another.

- 5 The poem's **structure** and **organisation**

For example, is the poem written in a particular form, such as a **sonnet** or a **monologue**? Are the verses regular (with the same number of lines in a verse)? Is there a **rhyme scheme**?

- 6 The **openings** and **endings**

For example, does it provide a resolution to a problem? Or does the reader feel something is unresolved? Does the ending return to the beginning to create a circular effect? Does it change the reader's understanding of the poem?

- 7 **Patterns of sound** and **rhythm**

For example, what sounds are created through the repetition of letters, such as beginning letters in **alliteration**, or vowels in **assonance**? What is the movement of the poem like? For example, is it bouncy comic poem, a slow **lament** or a sad song? Does the pace change?

- 8 **Contexts** and **settings**

For example, what influenced the poet? Do you know the historical period in which the poem was written? Is a period referred to or expressed in the poem, such as the speaker recalling a memory from the past? Can you tell when or where the poem was set?

TOP TIP

A01

Always read a poem at least twice before you begin writing about it. On your first reading you are likely to get a general impression of the poem's tone and what it is about. On your second reading try to focus on the rhythm and language choice. You should find the meaning becomes clearer you start to notice the poet's techniques and their effects.

When We Two Parted

Form: Four **octaves** and regular rhyme reinforce the **repetition**.

Structure: Two stressed syllables **repeated** in every line, reminiscent of chant/**lament**.

Language: Suggests decline and death, accentuating the idea that the relationship is at an end.

Theme – separation: The lover's 'kiss' is distant.

Language – vocabulary choice: 'dew' reinforces the images of 'tears' and 'Sorrow', stanza one.

Language: Appeals to the sense of touch. Also suggests panic, relating to the speaker's fear of the future.

Key technique – foreshadowing: See lines 7–8.

Key technique: The lover's name is a **metaphor** for the bell rung at funerals, emphasising the death of love.

When we two parted

In **silence** and **tears**,

Half broken-hearted

To sever for years,

5 **Pale** grew thy cheek and **cold**,

Colder thy kiss;

Truly that hour **foretold**

Sorrow to this.

The **dew** of the morning

10 **Sunk chill** on my brow –

It felt like the warning

Of what **I** feel now.

Thy vows are all broken,

And light is thy fame;

15 **I** hear thy name spoken,

And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,

A **knell** in mine ear;

A shudder comes o'er me –

20 Why wert thou so dear?

They know not I knew thee,

Theme – separation: Strong opening suggests the key theme.

Theme – separation: 'half' implies only the speaker's heart is broken.

Context – Romanticism: Concerned with intense feelings, as in the pain of parting.

Language: Appeals to the sense of touch. Suggests sickness and death and links to 'Pale'.

Key technique – foreshadowing: The lovers' parting (stanza one) suggested 'Sorrow' and 'shame' would follow (stanza two).

Viewpoint: First person (speaker) addresses second person (lover); emphasises an intimate relationship.

Key technique – irony: Those who gossip about the lover in front of the speaker are unaware she was the speaker's lover.

Who knew thee too well –

Long, long shall I rue thee,

Too deeply to tell.

Theme: The speaker regrets the relationship, or loss of it? Or both?

Sound – alliteration:
The hushed **sibilant** sound reflects the illicit relationship.

25 In **secret** we met –

In **silence** I grieve,

That thy heart could forget,

Thy **spirit deceive**.

If I should meet thee

30 After **long** years,

How should I greet thee? –

With silence and tears.

Theme – illicit love: The lovers' meetings were concealed.

Sound – alliteration:
The hushed **sibilant** sound reflects the illicit relationship.

Key technique – repetition:
'long' refers back to **stanza** three, reinforcing the duration/depth of feelings.

Key technique – rhetorical question: Gives impact, accentuates sense of loss.

Language: The use of the conditional 'If' suggests the speaker may hope to meet the lover again in the future, reinforcing the idea that the speaker's feelings of grief are likely to persist, as in the final line.

Structure: Circular – returns to beginning. **Repetition** implies the speaker is unable to forget.

Lord Byron (1788–1824)

Structure: Time shifts – past (stanza one), past/present (2), present (3), future (4) – suggest the speaker's feelings will last forever.



KEY CONTEXT

A03

Lord Byron (1788–1824) was a notorious but highly influential **Romantic** poet, who died young of fever in Greece. There is evidence to suggest that he altered the publication date of 'When We Two Parted' to protect Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. Certainly the reader's curiosity is aroused, as the poem keeps secret the lover's identity when the speaker declares, 'They know not I knew thee' (21).

SUMMARY

- The speaker is looking back at the end of an illicit relationship.
- He recalls the sorrow of the parting, the coldness of the lover and the sense of foreboding he felt.
- Now that the lover has become the object of gossip, the speaker shares a sense of guilt, albeit secretly.
- He can no longer understand why the lover was important to him, and regrets the affair.
- He silently mourns her faithlessness, and he anticipates that should they meet again years later he would receive her in the same way as when they parted.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The main themes are **illicit love** and **separation**. Other themes include, **unfaithfulness**, **regret** and **foreboding**.
- B The poem is a **lyric** poem from the Romantic period.
- C The poem is told in the **first person** and the poem is addressed to the ex-lover.
- D The **images** often evoke **intensity of feeling**.
- E The poem is written in four **octaves** with a regular **rhyme scheme**.



TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT LINKED THEMES

A02

Remember that the themes in the poem are closely related. For example, the illicit nature of the love expressed in the poem emphasises secrecy. This is related to the theme of foreboding – a fear not only of discovery and 'shame' (16) but also of betrayal.

KEY SETTING: SHIFTS IN TIME

A01

Byron creates no specific setting in the poem other than the time of day when the lovers parted, which was early morning when the 'dew' (9) had fallen. **Stanzas** one and two focus on the recollection of this parting – an unidentified moment. There is then a shift in time in stanza two. We are brought forward into the poem's present when the speaker realises that the loved one has become the object of rumour: 'They name thee before me' (17). Here, we can only imagine a group of people in conversation without a specific sense of place. Finally, we are taken into the future when the speaker imagines what might happen if he and his lover ever 'should meet' (29) again. This lack of setting heightens the secrecy, an important theme in the poem. It also stresses intensity of feeling (a feature of Romantic poetry) – the reader, who has limited information about the external world, must focus on the inner feelings of the speaker.



AIMING HIGH: A KEY REPETITION



The poem opens as the speaker recalls parting from his lover in 'silence and tears' (2). The image is repeated at the end of the poem, so that even 'After long years' (30) the speaker supposes that his feelings would not have altered. The effect that Byron creates by using repetition is to drive home the depth of feeling of loss. However, by placing the words 'silence and tears' (2, 32) at the beginning of the poem and at the end, Byron also creates a circular effect. The reader is returned to the beginning of the poem and the speaker's memory of 'when we two parted' (1) – to the title as well as the first line of the poem. So we are left with the impression that the speaker may never be free of the intense emotional memory and nature of the parting.

KEY TECHNIQUE: A GRIM IRONY

A02

In the third stanza Byron creates a grim and complex **irony**. The lover's name is mentioned (presumably at a social gathering). Those present are not aware that the named woman was the speaker's lover, 'They know not I knew thee' (21), and are unaware that he knew her 'too well' (22). And there is further irony in the speaker knowing her 'too well' (22) or being too close. He has learnt to his sorrow that despite their closeness she has still 'broken' her 'vows' (13) and physically separated him from her.

KEY LANGUAGE: IMAGERY OF PAIN

A02

Much of the imagery Byron creates is associated with pain: of separation, of lovesickness and grief. A verb such as 'sever' (4) depicts a brutal separation. It also has associations with cutting and wounding, while 'Half broken-hearted' (3) implies it is only one heart that is broken: the speaker's. Images of the lover's 'pale' 'cold' 'cheek' (5) suggest loss of passion. The 'chill' on the speaker's 'brow' (10) suggests sickness, or lovesickness. In stanza three the lover's name sounds 'a knell' (18), which causes the speaker to 'shudder' (19). Both these words are reminiscent of the bell rung at funerals; a **metaphor** for the love that has died. The images reinforce the speaker's pain and act as a commentary on human nature and its capacity to hurt others.

TOP TIP

A02

Notice how the words 'hour foretold' (7) in stanza one and 'warning' (11) in stanza two **foreshadow** the shame the speaker shares with the lover who has become the subject of rumour.

Key technique: The title **personifies** Love in order to highlight the argument the speaker is making.

Theme: The nature of romantic love.

Context –

Romanticism:

Expresses feeling through depicting the natural world as a **metaphor** for perfection and harmony, and as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution's destruction of nature.

Love's Philosophy

The fountains mingle with the river

And the rivers with the Ocean,

The winds of Heaven mix for **ever**

With a sweet emotion;

5 Nothing in the world is single;

All things by a law **divine**

In one another's being mingle —

Why not I with **thine**?

Structure:

The regular rhyme maintains easy rhythm, reinforces idea of harmony.

Key technique –

imagery: Appeals to the sense of touch, to create feelings of intimacy/unity.

See the mountains kiss high Heaven

10 And the waves clasp one another;

No **sister-flower** would be forgiven

If it disdain'd its brother:

And the **sunlight clasps** the earth,

And the moonbeams **kiss** the sea —

15 what are all these kissings worth,

If thou kiss not me?

Sound – **sibilant:**

Heavy use of 's' creates a soft sound associated with tenderness and love, or the sound of a kiss.

Theme:

The **rhetorical question** suggests the theme of seduction.

Key technique

– **enjambment:**

Takes the idea of winds and emotion flowing together into the next line.

Viewpoint:

The speaker argues (in the **form** of two **octaves**) it is natural for lovers to come together.

Theme:

Pairings highlight **romantic love** and **unity**.

Key technique –

metonym: 'Heaven' indicates 'sky' here, creating a sense of expansiveness and joy.

Language:

The female and nature form a compound word, reinforcing the **theme** of **unity**.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

Structure: Lines 5, 6 (first octave) present the speaker's argument that in nature everything is united. Lines 11, 12 (second octave) suggest a rejection of the argument is unforgivable. Final lines ask what is the value of unity if the lover will not unite with the speaker.

Structure: The **rhyme scheme** *abab cdcd* works with the rhythm to create a light harmonious movement, reflecting the optimistic **theme** of romantic love.

SUMMARY

- The speaker addresses a potential lover about the nature of love in an attempt to persuade the lover to kiss him.
- He suggests that in nature everything comes in pairs.
- He emphasises these dualities, insisting that this is the natural order of things.
- He goes further and argues that a rejection of this duality is unforgivable.
- Because nothing in nature is single it is appropriate that he and the woman should be together, he suggests. If they are not, what is the value of all these pairings in nature, he asks?

KEY CONTEXT A03

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was a major Romantic poet and radical who died in a boating accident in Italy. He wrote political pamphlets as well as poetry, was a strong supporter of social justice for the poor, a lover of nature, a vegetarian and an atheist. He felt that poetry should be the voice of transformation and also rebellion. 'Love's Philosophy' was written in 1820 when Shelley was living in Italy. 'To A Skylark' and 'The Cloud' were also written around the same time. All three poems personify Nature.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The main theme of the poem is **the nature of romantic love**. Another theme is **seduction**.
- B The poem is a **lyric** poem from the **Romantic** period, and also an **argument** in the **first person**.
- C **Pathetic fallacy** is also used to describe aspects of nature.
- D In the poem Love and Nature, **abstract nouns**, are personified.
- E The poem is written in two octaves with a regular rhyme scheme and **cadence**.

KEY SETTING: A BACKDROP A02

Shelley does not tell us where or when the speaker addresses the would-be lover. Instead, the poet creates scenes in which different features of Nature are depicted as communing with one another, so for example, 'fountains mingle with the river/ And the rivers with the Ocean' (1, 2) or 'mountains kiss high Heaven' (9) – a **metonym** for the sky. The effect of these scenes is to form a backdrop that represents an ideal world, a world in which love is the guiding principle and where everything is in harmony. Within this harmony, however, there is constant change, so that a feature blends into another, transforming itself.



KEY QUOTATION: UNITY A02

Shelley uses the last two lines to highlight the main point of the poem as a rhetorical question to support his argument: 'what are all these kissings worth/If though kiss not me?' (15, 16). In other words, none of Nature's pairings are worth anything unless the speaker can unite with the object of his affections.

TOP TIP A02

Apart from the key quotation, there is another rhetorical question at the end of verse one. It is different in tone from the key quotation. Try to explain why.

EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT EFFECTS

A02



Read what one student has written about how the poet creates effects through imagery.

A good opening point about the type of imagery

A sound example of a literary technique that is also embedded in the sentence

Most of the imagery Shelley creates in the poem comes from Nature's four elements: earth, fire, water and air. He presents them as features of the natural world that are paired with each other, so that 'waves clasp one another' or 'sunlight clasps the earth'. In addition verbs such as 'clasp' and 'kiss' personify the features as though they were lovers, and the love between them is 'a law divine', meaning it is sacred. The effect of this duality throughout the poem is that the reader feels that Shelley's argument that two people should come together to love one another is natural, and therefore to reject it is ...

A useful connective to highlight an extra point

A good reference to the effects Shelley creates

Now you try it:

Complete the last sentence, showing how the lovers are like the features of Nature in the poem.

KEY TECHNIQUE: A LIGHT MOVEMENT

A02

The poem is written in two **octaves**. The simple **rhyme scheme** *ababdcdd* works together with the easy rhythm to produce a light movement. The rhymes, for example 'single/mingle' (5/7) or 'sea/me' (14/16) have a light, rhythmic sound. This is part of the lightness of the voice, and reinforces the optimistic theme of romantic love and the benign movement of the natural world such as water and wind. Frequent **enjambment** carries an idea from one line to another, as in 'No sister-flower would be forgiven/ If it disdain'd its brother' (11, 12), reinforcing the flowing movement. The dash which occurs towards the end of each **stanza** acts as a pause and emphasises the line that follows.

TOP TIP

A02

Repetition is a common technique. Reread the poem and find as many repeated words as you can. What do you think is the overall effect of these on the reader?

CHECKPOINT 1

A02

What do you think 'Love's Philosophy' is?



Porphyria's Lover

Key technique – pathetic fallacy: The wind takes on human qualities, creating a brooding, sinister effect.

The rain set early in to-night,

The sullen wind was soon awake,

It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

And did its worst to vex the lake:

Key technique: Image of malevolent weather hints at the violence to come

Key technique: Suggests the movement of a ghostly form, foreshadowing Porphyria's death.

5 I listened with heart fit to break.

When glided in Porphyria; straight

She shut the cold out and the storm,

And kneeled and made the cheerless grate

Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;

Form and viewpoint – dramatic monologue: A single voice/narrator creates a strong sense of character.

Language: The poet contrasts the warmth of the cottage with extreme weather, lulling the reader into a false sense of security.

10 Which done, she rose, and from her form

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,

And laid her soiled gloves by, untied

Her hat and let the damp hair fall,

Structure: The regular rhyme helps to move the narrative along.

Key technique – repetition: Helps to build the rhythmical power of the poem, driving the narrative along towards the climax and murder.

And, last, she sat down by my side

15 And called me. When no voice replied,

She put my arm about her waist,

And made her smooth white shoulder bare,

And all her yellow hair displaced,

Key technique: A key image is often repeated, representing beauty, desire and death.

Key language: Image suggests Porphyria's physical beauty and the speaker's desire to possess her.

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,

20 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,

Murmuring how she loved me – she

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,

To set its struggling passion free

From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

Language: Suggests Porphyria has another life beyond the cottage.

25 And give herself to me for ever.

But passion sometimes would prevail,

Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain

A sudden thought of one so pale

For love of her, and all in vain:

Language: Suggests Porphyria is affluent, which contrasts with the speaker's life.

Key language: Suggests speaker is passive, self-pitying. Sees himself as powerless?

30 So, she was come through wind and rain.

Be sure I looked up at her eyes

Key language: Suggests the speaker has convinced himself that Porphyria's visit reveals not only love, but devotion, also suggesting he is unbalanced.

Key technique: Image suggests the hangman's noose. Is the speaker punishing Porphyria for her other life?

Key theme: Speaker's blunt recounting emphasises theme of **mental instability**.

Structure: **iambic tetrameter** and simple rhyme reinforce the shock of the murder.

Key language: Positions are reversed (see line 19). Porphyria's head rests on the speaker's shoulder, suggesting that he is now in control.

Key technique – ambiguity: The speaker's motives for the crime are uncertain. Is God's approval needed?

Happy and proud; at last I knew

Porphyria worshipped me: surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew

35 While I debated what to do.

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

Perfectly pure and good: I found

A thing to do, and all her hair

In one long **yellow string** I wound

40 Three times her little throat around,

And strangled her. No pain felt she;

I am quite sure she felt no pain.

As a shut bud that holds a bee,

I warily oped her lids: **again**

45 Laughed the blue eyes without a **stain**.

And I untightened next the tress

About her neck; **her cheek once more**

Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

I propped her head up as before,

50 Only, this time my shoulder bore

Her head, which droops upon it still:

The smiling rosy little head,

So glad it has its utmost will,

That all it scorned at once is fled,

55 And I, its love, am gained instead!

Porphyria's love: she guessed not how

Her darling one wish would be heard.

And thus we sit together now,

And all night long we have not stirred,

60 And yet God has not said a word!

Viewpoint: Unreliable, since Porphyria has no voice.

Voice: Although the speaker narrates events there is no dialogue with Porphyria. Events are recounted through his thoughts, suggesting intensity and obsession.

Key technique: A powerful **simile** of imprisonment and death.

Context: A macabre image of the speaker drawn to the corpse, reminiscent of **Gothic horror**.

Theme: Porphyria's death and passivity depict **female subjection**.

Robert Browning (1812–1889)

SUMMARY

- The speaker looks back at the events that night, telling how Porphyria, the woman he loves, arrives during a storm.
- He describes how she makes a fire, takes off her wet outer garments and sits next to him, placing his arm around her waist.
- We are told that her wet hair falls across her bare shoulder where she places the speaker's cheek, and she whispers her love for him.
- Despite her passion, she will not give in to him; she has other ties.
- The speaker nonetheless believes that Porphyria adores him.
- He describes how he winds her hair three times around her throat and strangles her. He claims she feels no pain.
- He describes his feelings of happiness at possessing her.
- Finally, he props her lifeless head on his shoulder and sits quietly, surprised that God has not yet spoken.

KEY CONTEXT

A03

Robert Browning (1812–89) was a famous Victorian poet and playwright, married to the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He is known for his dramatic monologues, many of which make observations about the condition of Victorian society. 'Porphyria's Lover' may have been influenced by a famous murder, in which the murdered woman had hair much like Porphyria's 'yellow hair' (18).

KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The speaker recounts the **narrative** directly to the reader. The poem is a **dramatic monologue**.
- B The calm, **colloquial** speech in which the speaker tells the horrific events suggests he is **out of touch with reality**. The themes are **perverse love** and **mental instability**.
- C The speaker's actions and attitudes also reveal the **theme** of **women's subjection**.
- D We do not know the speaker's **motives** for the crime, which make them **ambiguous**.
- E The disturbing and **transgressive** nature of the poem also places it in the **Gothic genre** (see **Part Three: Contexts**).
- F The poem has a regular **rhyme scheme** and is written in iambic tetrameter.

CHECKPOINT 2

A01

How would you interpret the final line of the poem?

KEY SETTING: INSIDE AND OUT

A02

There are two settings in the poem. The first is a storm, a series of violent **images** in which Browning uses **pathetic fallacy**. The 'sullen wind' (2) rips the 'elm-tops' (3) out of 'spite' (3) and does 'its worst to vex the lake' (4). These malevolent descriptions, coupled with the motionless speaker inside the cottage who listens 'with heart fit to break' (5), create an unsettling effect. Does it hint at something distressing to come? If so, we cannot guess how disturbing this will in fact be.

The second setting is the interior of the cottage. It contrasts with the disorder outside and appears calm and undisturbed, if dismal. When Porphyria enters she not only has the power to shut out the external chaos, but also to bring warmth by making 'the cheerless grate/Blaze up' (8, 9). Browning creates a false impression that the cottage is a place of safety.



KEY CONTEXT

A03

An article published in 'Extracts from Gosschen's Diary', *Blackwood's Magazine* (1818) about the murder of a woman who had 'radiant golden hair' similar to Porphyria's may well have influenced Browning's choice of subject.

TOP TIP

A02

Notice how the dramatic monologue allows Browning to highlight ambiguity in this poem, because we only hear the events through the speaker, not Porphyria. The speaker is out of touch with reality, so he is unreliable and we cannot be sure that what he says is to be trusted.

TOP TIP

A01

Porphyria is a visitor to the cottage. The 'vainer ties' (24) she has refer to her life beyond the cottage. Find evidence in the poem that gives clues as to what this life might be like.

TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT THE SPEAKER AND PORPHYRIA

A01

It's important that you can write about the dynamic between Porphyria and the speaker. Although in control of the story through the dramatic monologue, the speaker is a passive character for the first part of the poem. He is immobile, while Porphyria is active. She sits beside him, guides his actions and tends to him, to 'one so pale/For love of her' (28, 29), suggesting that he is lovesick, perhaps ill. His love, he adds, is hopeless. Does she not truly love him? Is she unable to give him what he wants? A few lines further on the speaker becomes convinced that Porphyria worships him. This drives him to enact his plan and the moment before she dies, she becomes all his: 'mine, mine' (36). Now he possesses his ideal woman, 'Perfectly pure and good' (37).



AIMING HIGH: MOTIVES



You will gain higher marks if you can explore the speaker's motives beyond his need to possess Porphyria. As a corpse, Porphyria is as passive as it is possible to be. She belongs to the speaker 'for ever' (25). In other words the speaker is able to control her entirely. Porphyria will never change, never be drawn to those unspecified 'vainer ties' (24) that seem to threaten his relationship with her. He has also convinced himself that this is what she wanted: 'Her darling one wish' (57). Whether or not Porphyria 'worshipped' (33) the speaker (the word implies god-like devotion), he can maintain the macabre belief that she will do so until the end of time. We could argue that in this respect he has become, in his own mind, a god.

Form/Structure: A love song in the form of a **Petrarchan sonnet** – the **octave** presents the problem or situation, the **volta** is the turning point, the **sestet** presents the resolution.

Context: An example of Victorian love poetry, from *Sonnets of the Portuguese*, dedicated to the poet's husband Robert Browning.

Sonnet 29 – 'I think of thee!'

Voice: First person, addresses the absent lover urgently, passionately.

I think of thee! – my thoughts do twine and bud

Key technique – simile: Uses nature **imagery**, showing how thoughts about the lover cling and increase.

About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,

Key technique: A **metaphor** for vine leaves, indicating the rambling nature of the speaker's feelings.

Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see

Language: Suggests that thoughts overwhelm, so the image of the lover is lost.

Except the straggling green which hides the wood.

Key technique: A **metaphor** for the masculine lover, portraying strength.

5 Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood

Structure: **iambic pentameter** makes the **voice** seem natural, fluent.

I will not have my thoughts instead of thee

Themes: Passionate love expressed.

Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly

Key technique – volta: A turning point in a **sonnet**; the speaker calls on the lover to appear.

Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,

Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,

Language: Nature imagery is used to create a sensual image.

10 And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee

Sound – assonance: The 'e' draws attention to this line to contrast with the following line.

Drop heavily down, – burst, shattered, everywhere!

Sound – alliteration: The 'd', is a heavy, downward sound, emphasising meaning.

Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee

Key technique – caesura: A pause works with alliteration to add emphasis.

And breathe within thy shadow a new air,

I do not think of thee – I am too near thee.

Key technique – enjambment: The idea continued into the next line helps to make the voice seem natural.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861)

Key technique: The ending contradicts the beginning (**antithesis**) to show the speaker and lover united (resolution).

Context: The poet's choice of 'vine' is appropriate; vine was called 'lovestone' during the 19th century because it clung to stone walls.

KEY CONTEXT

A03

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61) is an important Victorian poet who suffered ill-health, but nonetheless actively opposed slavery and child labour, and was concerned about the position of women. The poem comes from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The volume is considered to have autobiographical links, because they are addressed to her husband, the poet Robert Browning, who wrote 'Porphyria's Lover'.

SUMMARY

- The speaker is preoccupied by thoughts of the one she loves.
- She describes how these thoughts seem to cling to him and multiply so that the image of him in her mind's eye is almost blotted out.
- She would far rather he was with her. Then she would not have this profusion of thoughts.
- She calls him to come to her.
- If he were near, her thoughts would be scattered.
- His presence would mean she would have no need to think of him.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The poem is a **Petrarchan sonnet** written in two **quatrains** (or an **octave**) and a **sestet** told in the **first person** and addressed to the loved one.
- B It is also a **lyric** poem.
- C Its main themes are **passionate love** and **separation**.
- D It uses striking **images** from **nature**.
- E The **voice** is passionate and seems **autobiographical**.

KEY SETTING: A VICTORIAN IMAGINATION

A01

Elizabeth Barrett Browning chooses no concrete setting for her sonnet, and we can only imagine the speaker as a woman from the Victorian period writing to her lover. The events or the poet's ideas are acted out in the speaker's mind, which is teeming with imagery that depicts the natural world of trees and vines. This imagery creates a backdrop for the reader.

KEY LANGUAGE: VINE AND TREE

A02

In the first two lines, the poet chooses a **simile** from the natural world to convey the intensity of the speaker's love, whose thoughts are like 'wild vines' (2) – an appropriate image to convey the clinging nature of these thoughts. Not only do they cling to the 'tree' (2), the **metaphor** that represents the masculine lover and conveys robustness and solidity, but they also grow abundantly. They create foliage that engulfs the tree. The speaker asks the loved one to appear. So the tree must 'Rustle' (9) its branches to shake off 'these bands of greenery' (10) – a metaphor for ridding the speaker of her profuse thoughts. Once the tree has lost the foliage the speaker will be able to breathe fresh air again. In other words, her thoughts will no longer be needed because the lover will be present.



AIMING HIGH: EXPLORING LOVE



Notice how Elizabeth Barrett Browning has chosen the Petrarchan sonnet form to explore the nature of love when lovers are separated. You can follow the shifts in meaning through the movement of the poem. Broadly, it lays out the concern or argument in the first quatrain and explores and develops it in the second. Finally in the sestet there is a change in the argument, idea or tone, and a resolution or final comment; this shift is called a **volta**. To gain more marks you could explore the effects produced by the volta. What is the shift like? Does it take the poem to an appropriate resolution? How does it relate to the poem as a whole? You could also consider whether or not the sonnet form the poet has chosen is a satisfactory one to convey the feelings she wants to express.



TOP TIP

A01

The nature of poetry is such that its meanings are rarely obvious and a great deal is open to interpretation. When you are writing about poetry it is always best to use verbs such as 'imply', 'suggest', 'infer' or 'assume'.

KEY VOICE: PASSION AND URGENCY

A02

The poet creates a passionate voice from the very beginning. The first words, '**I think of thee!**' (1) are punctuated with an exclamation mark to convey sincerity, and to emphasise the verb '**think**' (1), because it is the speaker's thoughts of her lover that consume her. It is also an intimate voice, suggested by the vines that cling to the tree. As the speaker describes her need for her lover's presence the voice becomes more urgent. The speaker's feelings must be '**understood**' (5) and her '**thoughts**' (6) are no substitute for his absence. '**Renew thy presence**' (8) she demands, and the poem ends with a passionate declaration of her sense of '**deep joy**' (12) when he is near.

TOP TIP

A02

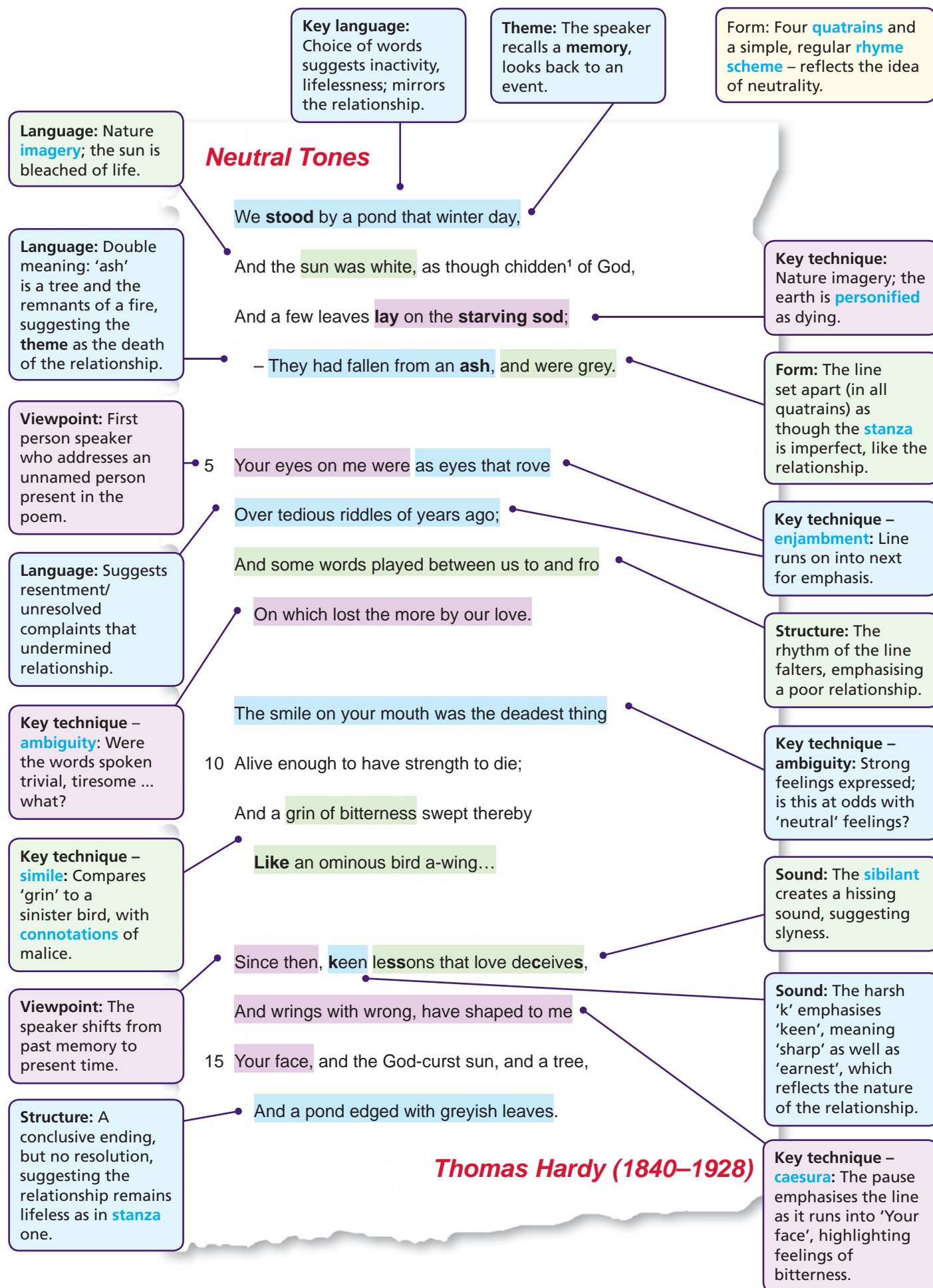
Remember that if a metaphor continues through the lines of the poem it becomes an **extended metaphor**. Reread the poem and decide whether the metaphor of the vine becomes an extended metaphor – and if so, how.

KEY QUOTATION: THE FINAL LINE

A02

Read on its own, the final line '**I do not think of thee – I am too near thee**' (14) might seem contrary. However, there is no real contradiction, for in the final line the poet no longer needs to be overwhelmed by thoughts of her absent lover once he is present. The first six words in the final line also contrast with the opening words, '**I think of thee!**' (1), where she is overwhelmed with thoughts of him in his absence. Inevitably we are drawn back to these opening words, and the poet may even have intended that we return to it to create a particular effect. Put together they form an **antithesis**: '**I think of thee!**' '**I do not think of thee ...**' (1, 14).





Glossary

¹ chidden = scorned

SUMMARY

- The poem opens as the speaker recalls a particular memory: he and another person (we may assume a lover) are near a pond and a tree in winter.
- He remembers that the other person looks at him as though remembering unresolved grievances. They exchange a few words that are either insignificant, or words that have been said many times before.
- He recalls that the other person's smile was cold and bitter.
- The speaker moves forward in time to consider what love means and how it creates untrustworthy feelings.
- These feelings are associated with the other person's face and the memory of that austere day.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The main theme is the **death of love**. Other related themes are **regret, loss and memory**.
- B The poem is written in four **quatrains**. It has a simple **rhyme scheme**. It is told in the **first person** and addressed to the other person.
- C The **rhythm** of the poem seems **regular at first, but is broken**, most frequently in the last line of each verse.
- D The images in the poem are bleak.

KEY CONTEXT

A03

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) was a hugely important novelist and poet, whose work is largely rural in setting. He was a commentator on the effect of the Industrial Revolution. 'Neutral Tones' was written in 1867. It is sometimes assumed that the poem reflects Hardy's experience of his first marriage, but it is an early poem written before he met his wife. However, it may reflect his sorrow at the death of the rural landscape, as parts of it became industrialised, 'grey' (4) and ashen.

TOP TIP

A02

Notice how Hardy conveys a tone of bitterness in the line 'keen lessons that love deceives' (13). It is partly achieved by the harsh consonant 'k' in 'keen' (13), and the stealthy sound in the soft 'c' of 'deceives' (13). Reread the poem. How is the tone of sadness achieved?



KEY SETTING: A BLEAK VIEW

A02

CHECKPOINT 3

A02

Do you think the title 'Neutral Tones' suits the poem?

Hardy creates a bleak setting, formed as a memory in the mind of the speaker, whose surroundings are dead or famished, from the 'grey' (4) leaves to the 'starving sod' (3). This final image is a **personification**, a technique that makes the desolate relationship more vivid in the reader's mind. The tree has **connotations** of death and the remnants of fire, suggesting that any passion has gone. The sun seems bleached 'white' (2) as though it has been 'chidden of God' (2) and lost its force. With these images of death and dying comes stillness. There is no indication that the water in the pond is moving, and the leaves have already fallen. Again, the reader is reminded that the relationship has ceased.

EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT EFFECTS

A02



Read what one student has written about the form and rhythm of the poem and how this creates effects.

Thorough use of literary techniques used by Hardy to create effects

A quotation successfully embedded in the sentence

Hardy uses an uncomplicated form for the poem, four quatrains with a simple regular rhyme scheme, *abba*. The effect of this repetition stresses the low-key tone, which is mirrored in the title, 'Neutral Tones'. However, the last line of each verse is set apart from the others. The effect of this technique reminds the reader of the separation between the speaker and the other person. Also, when we read the last line we pause, and it is almost like a sigh, as though the speaker is expressing his sadness or resentment at the relationship. Another feature is that the regular rhythm is broken in lines such as 'And some words played between us to and fro', so that it jars slightly.

An appropriate way of describing the reader's emotional response to the line

Now you try it:

Add a sentence to say what the effect is of the broken rhythm on our understanding of the relationship between the speaker and the other person.

KEY THEME: THE DEATH OF LOVE

A02

CHECKPOINT 4

A01

What do you think the line 'On which lost the more by our love' (8) could mean?

As well as presenting the main theme through the desolate images of the landscape, Hardy also presents it through the speaker's observations of the other person in the poem. The other person's 'smile' is the 'deadest thing' (9), while the **simile** 'grin of bitterness' 'like an ominous bird' (11, 12) makes the other person seem malevolent. One of the starkest images is in the last verse. When we read that 'love deceives/And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me' (13, 14) we must run on to the next line carrying the image with us, to read 'Your face' (15). It has a disturbing effect, and it sits so close to the image of 'the God-curst sun' (15) that it is inevitably linked.

