

# YORK NOTES for GCSE

## STUDY GUIDE

New for GCSE (9–1)

**NEW EDITION**  
with complete  
annotated poems

# POWER AND CONFLICT

## AQA POETRY ANTHOLOGY



YORK NOTES



# **POWER AND CONFLICT**

## **AQA POETRY ANTHOLOGY**

**NOTES BY BETH KEMP**

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# PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

## PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT

### HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED ON MY WORK ON POWER AND CONFLICT?

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

Assessment Objectives	Wording	Worth thinking about ...
<b>A01</b>	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response</li> <li>● use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How well do I know what happens, what people say, do, etc., in each poem?</li> <li>● What do I think about the key ideas in the poems?</li> <li>● How can I support my viewpoint in a really convincing way?</li> <li>● What are the best quotations to use and when should I use them?</li> </ul>
<b>A02</b>	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"> <li>● 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?)</li> <li>● What effects do these choices create? (Suspense? Sympathy? Awe?)</li> </ul>
<b>A03</b> *	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What can I learn about society from the poems? (What do they tell me about justice and prejudice, for example?)</li> <li>● What was/is society like for the poets? Can I see it reflected in their poems?</li> </ul>

\***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

Every poem annotated with lots of useful ideas and interpretations

### PROGRESS AND REVISION CHECK

#### SECTION ONE: CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Answer these quick questions to test your basic knowledge of the language, form and structure of the poems.

- Which poem is a sonnet, and what is unusual about it?
- Who speaks in a low register, and in which poem?
- In which poem is a 'huge peak' personified?
- In which poem does the image 'mind-forged manacles' occur and what does it refer to?
- In what metre is 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' written?
- What does a caesura do?
- What language technique is used in 'Checking Out Me History'?
- Which poem uses repetition of 'But nothing happens'?
- What is a dramatic monologue?
- In which poem does the image of 'paper kites' appear, and what might they represent?

#### SECTION TWO: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Here is a task about a poetic techniques. This requires more thought and a longer response. Try to write at least three to four paragraphs.

**Task:** How does Seamus Heaney show that nature can be powerful in 'Storm on the Island'? Think about:

- What poetic techniques the poet uses
- What effects are created through these techniques

#### PROGRESS CHECK

GOOD PROGRESS

I can:

- Explain how the poets use key poetic techniques to shape events, show relationships and develop ideas.
- Use relevant quotations to support the points I make, and refer 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.

### PART TWO PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: 'OZYMANDIAS'

**Context:** A partial statue of Ramses II (Ozymandias in Ancient Greece) was brought to London from Greece when this poem was written.

**Viewpoint:** Reported speech creates distancing effect.

**Language:** Semantic field of deterioration.

**Sound:** Assonance emphasises Pharaoh's dismissive attitude.

**Theme:** Passions – i.e. tyranny and arrogance – survive while the actual empire does not.

**Form:** Shelley disrupts the sonnet form to symbolise decay by switching ideas here (line 9) while completing the rhyme pattern with 'kings' in the line below.

**Key technique:** Irony through structure – placing this immediately after grandiose claim shows its emptiness.

**Form:** Turning point mid-line shifts focus from statue to desert; Shelley disrupts traditional sonnet form, replicating breakdown of Ozymandias's power.

**Context:** The character of the 'traveller' reduces any direct criticism of monarchy/government by Shelley.

**Language:** Semantic field of deterioration.

**Sound:** Imperfect rhyme supports themes of decay and corruption.

**Sound:** Harsh-sounding alliteration foregrounds Pharaoh's cruelty.

**Key technique:** Irony through juxtaposition, showing survival of passions by being recorded on lifeless things, i.e. the parts of the statue.

**Language:** Ambiguous – Ozymandias mocks his people or sculptor mocks Ozymandias?

**Theme:** Power lifting itself up for display.

**Theme:** Arrogant declaration.

**Language:** Imperative to other rulers shows arrogance.

**Language:** Semantic field of deterioration.

**Sound:** Alliteration creates harmonious image of infinite nature contrasting with Pharaoh's brutal and short-lived regime.

**Ozymandias**

I met a traveller from an antique land

Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,

Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of gold command

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,

The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal these words appear:

10 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

**Glossary**  
<sup>1</sup> trunkless = without a torso  
**8 POWER AND CONFLICT**

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

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.

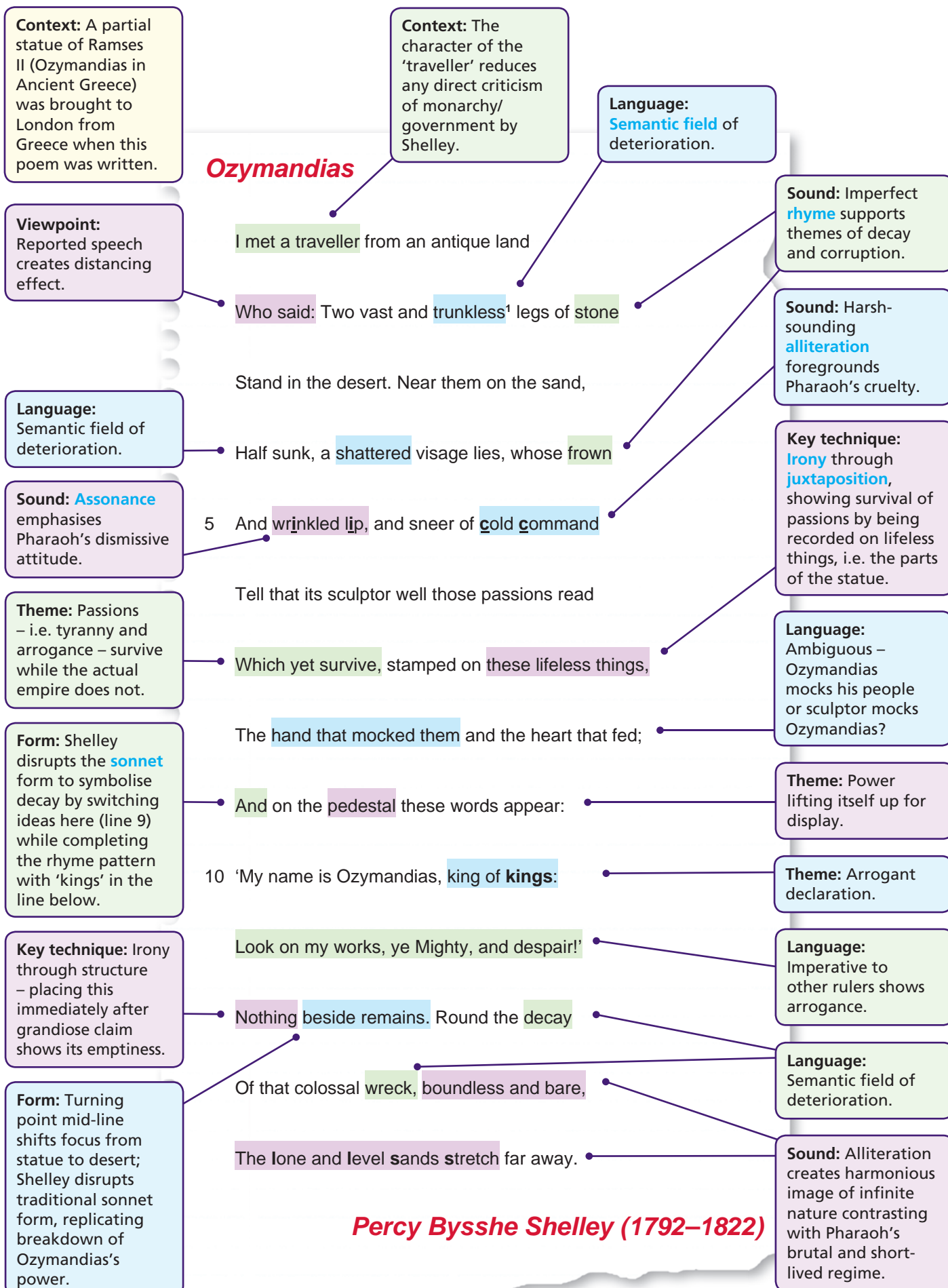
These will include:

- 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, does the poem seem to be 'told' to us by one specific person or speaker? Is it a conversation? Some poems have a speaker who addresses us directly, while others maintain a more neutral or authoritative voice.
- 3 The '**message**' and/or **theme** of the poem – its concerns  
For example, does the poem explicitly direct the reader to consider a particular issue? Are there questions that it raises? This aspect is related to the poem's topic or subject, but is a broader issue – usually something more universal.
- 4 The poem's distinctive **language features**, or **poetic techniques** used by the poet  
For example, how is the poem written? Does it use rich **imagery**? Everyday language? Are there significant **semantic fields**, patterns of **rhyme**, **rhythm**, **alliteration**? (And, of course: what is the effect of this?)
- 5 The poem's **structure** and **organisation**  
For example, is the poem organised into stanzas? Is there a chronological or other order to the information we are given? How are sentence and line lengths used?
- 6 The **opening** and **ending**  
For example, what is the impact of the poem's opening? Is there repetition or some kind of balance in how the poem opens and closes? Does the ending change our understanding of earlier lines?
- 7 **Patterns of sound** and **rhythm**  
For example, does the poet use repeated rhythms, rhyming patterns or use alliteration and **assonance** in a repeated or patterned way? What is the impact of these patterns – or lack of pattern?
- 8 **Contexts** and **settings**  
For example, what might have been the poet's background or influences? Can you infer any influences from the time the poem was written or where the poem 'takes place' (if relevant)?

#### 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 choices and you should find the meaning becomes clearer and you start to notice the poet's techniques and their effects.



**Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)**

## Glossary

<sup>1</sup> trunkless = without a torso



## SUMMARY

- The speaker retells a conversation with a traveller about an old, broken statue in the desert.
- The traveller describes two legs and a powerful-looking, disdainful face.
- The statue's pedestal says it is of 'Ozymandias, king of kings' (10) and bids the onlooker – and especially other kings – to admire his works and 'despair' (11).
- The ending describes the barrenness of the desert around the broken statue.

## KEY CONTEXT

A03

Shelley (1792–1822) was a Romantic poet well known for his radical and anti-establishment ideas. He came from a wealthy Sussex family, attended Eton and was disinherited after being expelled from Oxford University for writing about atheism.

'Ozymandias' can be seen as a political statement against any one person or group gaining great power and wealth, and shows that such power can be lost.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A** The use of the **traveller** to describe the statue **distances** the reader from the poem's original speaker. This sense of distance supports the poem's ancient subject matter, while the **reported speech** element helps to make the views expressed seem **universal** and **absolute**.
- B** Shelley's use of **irony** contrasts the arrogance of the inscription with the actual physical state of the statue, showing how **worldly power** crumbles and fades.
- C** 'Ozymandias' is a **sonnet** in **pentameter** using **rhyme**. This **form** gives it weight and a serious **tone**.





## KEY SETTING: THE EGYPTIAN DESERT

A03

Ozymandias was the Ancient Greek name for the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II. The poem was inspired by the removal of parts of a statue from a temple in Greece to the British Museum at the time Shelley was writing. The great riches and advanced civilisation of Ancient Egypt are well known still, and yet the actual power associated with this culture has long since disappeared.

Shelley depicts the desert as a barren wasteland, which may symbolically represent the pointlessness of great empires. Another aspect of the setting is the framing device: the way the poem is effectively all reported speech from 'a traveller' (1). Almost as a final insult, Ozymandias, 'king of kings' (10), is further reduced to being just a story passed around in chance encounters, and we don't know where the poem's speaker is or where the meeting took place.

## KEY TECHNIQUE: IRONY

A02

Shelley uses irony to enable the reader to share his criticism of Ozymandias, and perhaps also of other all-powerful regimes. Despite Ozymandias's statement about his 'works' (11), nothing is left now except the statue, which makes the boastful comment ironic, and highlights how wrong Ozymandias was to make such bold claims.

Shelley also creates irony through **juxtaposition**: by placing Ozymandias's grand claims so physically close in the poem to the simple sentence 'Nothing beside remains' (12). This statement reveals the king's boasts to be ironic in their inaccuracy and makes them – and him – ridiculous.

The timing of this within the poem as a whole is also highly effective, as it follows the detailed description of how the sculptor has portrayed Ozymandias's attitude in his physical appearance. Shelley builds up the reader's sense of the king's arrogance gradually before presenting the inscription. Finally the emptiness of the desert is emphasised through two pairs of **adjectives** linked by **alliteration**: 'boundless and bare' (14) and 'lone and level' (15).

## CHECKPOINT 1

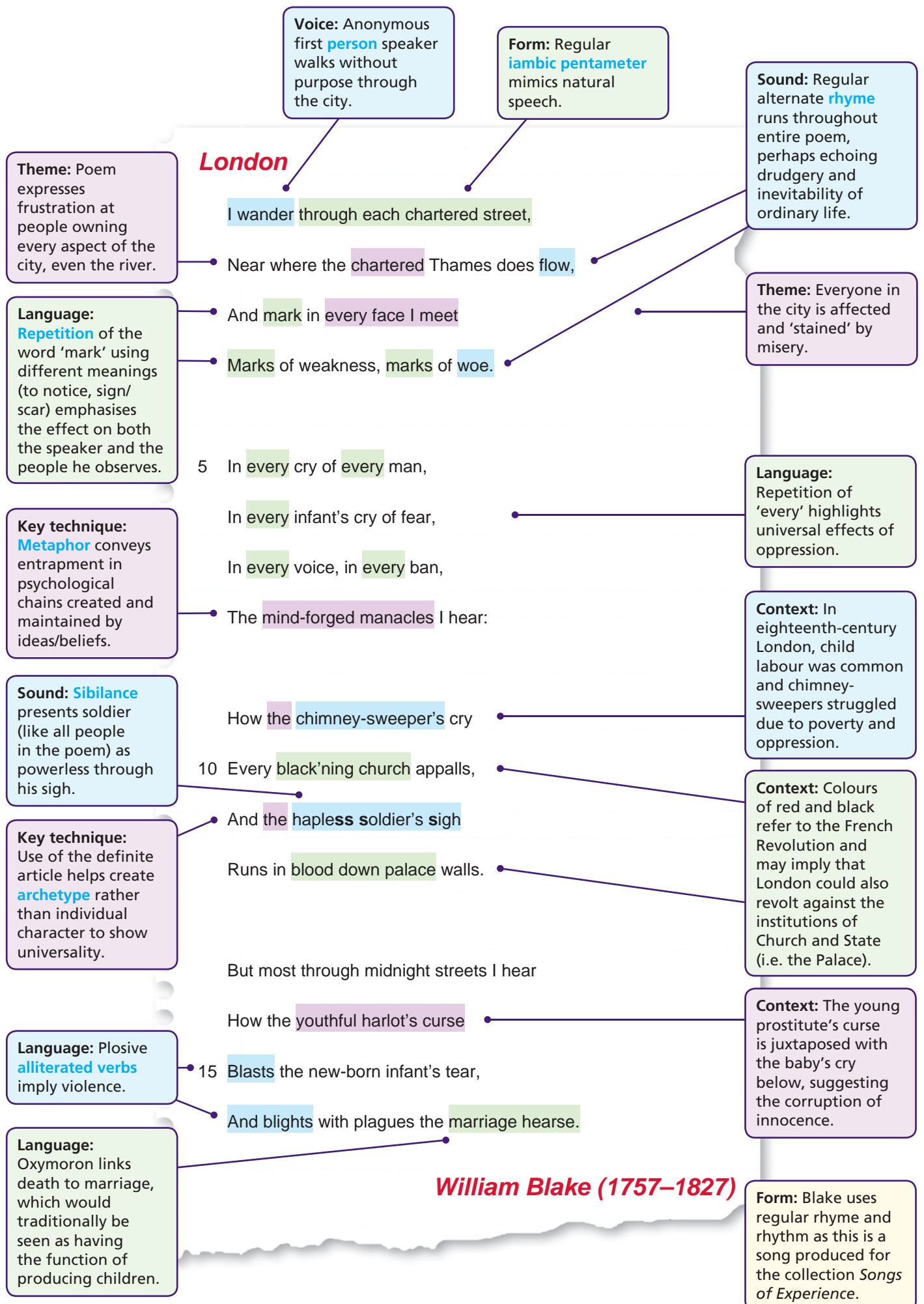
A01

What does 'visage' (4) mean?

## TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT SHELLEY'S USE OF THE SONNET FORM

A02

Sonnets can usually be separated into distinct sections according to their rhyme schemes: generally a block of eight lines followed by one of six with different rhyming patterns. Shelley, however, disrupts this pattern in 'Ozymandias' by continuing the rhymes of the octave into the sestet and only gradually introducing new ones. This is highly unusual, to the extent that this poem is often cited as an exception in critical works on sonnet forms. The metre and rhyme scheme Shelley uses in 'Ozymandias' is unique, which fits with the poem's exotic subject matter. Many critics see Shelley's subversion of the sonnet form here as deliberate, as his way of representing the decay and breakdown of both Ozymandias's power and the civilisation he ruled in the very structure of the poem.





## KEY CONTEXT

A03

Blake (1757–1827) is regarded as a Romantic poet, and as a radical and mystic thinker. He worked as an engraver and was not well known as a poet during his lifetime. He believed strongly in the idea of revolution, seeing rebellion against oppression as inevitable but also as morally right. 'London' summarises his frustrations about his beloved home city, which he saw as corrupted by greed and inequality.

## KEY CONTEXT

A03

A charter grants rights of ownership and use. Blake felt that charters gave rights only to the wealthy, often allowing people and companies to own and control land and resources which previously had not been privately owned but had been available for the public to use.



## SUMMARY

- The speaker notices how oppressed people in London have become now that everything is 'chartered' (1–2).
- This is apparent in all kinds of people, who are trapped in the symbolic chains referred to as 'mind-forged manacles' (8).
- The speaker refers to child workers and soldiers, and connects them to institutions such as the church and the 'palace' (12), both of which are presented as dramatically stained.
- Finally, the speaker reflects on the pitiful state of the streets at night, linking the ideas of prostitutes, new-born babies, disease, marriage and death.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The **repetition** in the first half of the poem is a key language technique, emphasising the speaker's initial **unhappiness** with the situation in London and building up to a strong picture of universal **oppression** with the **five-fold repetition** of 'every' (5–10).
- B Blake uses a regular **rhythm** and **rhyme** scheme. The poem comes from his collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, so a **song-like feel** is appropriate. This is an 'Experience' poem, giving a more **mature** and more **pessimistic** view of the world.
- C Some of Blake's **vocabulary choices** are worth noting. The **verbs** 'forged' (8), 'appalls' (10), 'blasts' (15) and 'blights' (16) are all forceful, which contributes to the poem's increasingly **violent tone**.

## KEY SETTING: LONDON

A03

Eighteenth-century London was developing rapidly under industrialisation, which resulted in considerable poverty and extremely poor living conditions. Child labour was commonplace, and poorer children in particular worked long hours in dangerous environments. Blake's poem outlines his concerns about Londoners' lack of personal freedom by underscoring the way the city was being controlled by charters at the time, and suggesting that even the river Thames was controlled by the powerful.

## KEY THEME: OPPRESSION

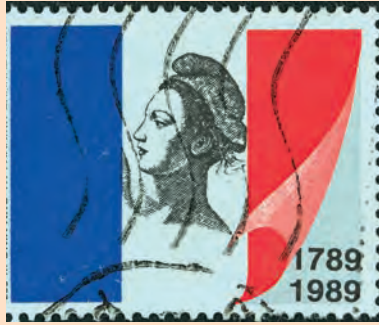
A02

Blake states that everyone he sees is affected by 'weakness' and 'woe' (4) but selects some particular victims of oppression to draw attention to in the poem. He singles out infants, chimney-sweepers, soldiers and prostitutes as individuals, all of whom can be seen as powerless in their specific contexts. For each of these, he uses a phrase with the definite article 'the' (9, 11, 14, 15) to make an individual into an **archetype**, so that they symbolise their whole profession or age. It is also worth noting that Blake pairs his comments on the sweeper and the soldier with the 'church' and the 'palace', implicating the institutions they represent in the oppression of these individuals.

## KEY CONTEXT: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

A03

Blake was known to be a supporter of the French Revolution and wore a red hat known as a Phrygian cap or *bonnet rouge* in the streets in the year when he was writing 'London'. These caps had been given to freed slaves by Ancient Romans to mark their new liberty and were therefore a powerful symbol of freedom. At its root, the French Revolution was about the oppression of the people as the aristocracy sought more power and wealth. Blake's poem alludes to this in the 'blood' running down 'palace walls' (12) and some consider that he is implying here that revolution could also happen in England. Red and black in French culture symbolise the institutions of the military (red) and the Church (black) because of the colours of their uniforms.



## KEY CONTEXT

A03

The French Revolution came about largely because of a sense of great inequality between classes. Lower classes revolted against injustice and eventually attacked the centres of power: the aristocracy, the monarchy and the Church. This resulted in the end of a monarchy in France with the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, followed by the Reign of Terror, when many men and women were executed by guillotine, including Queen Marie Antoinette.

## KEY QUOTATION: TRAPPED BY FALSE CHAINS

A02

The phrase 'mind-forged manacles' (8) is perhaps the most famous from this poem and has been discussed by many critics, owing to its ambiguity. Both the noun 'mind' and the verb 'forged' can be interpreted in more than one way, although the overall interpretation remains the same: the people of London are enslaved by chains which are not physically real, but are products of the imagination. The use of the word 'manacles' invokes the idea of slavery.

Blake may be implying that other minds have created these manacles, or that people have internalised the oppression and are now effectively holding themselves hostage. Either interpretation of 'mind' is supported by the poem. Equally, the verb 'forged' seems to refer to blacksmithing, producing manacles from iron, while at the same time perhaps making the reader think of forgery, of manacles that are fake or untrue.

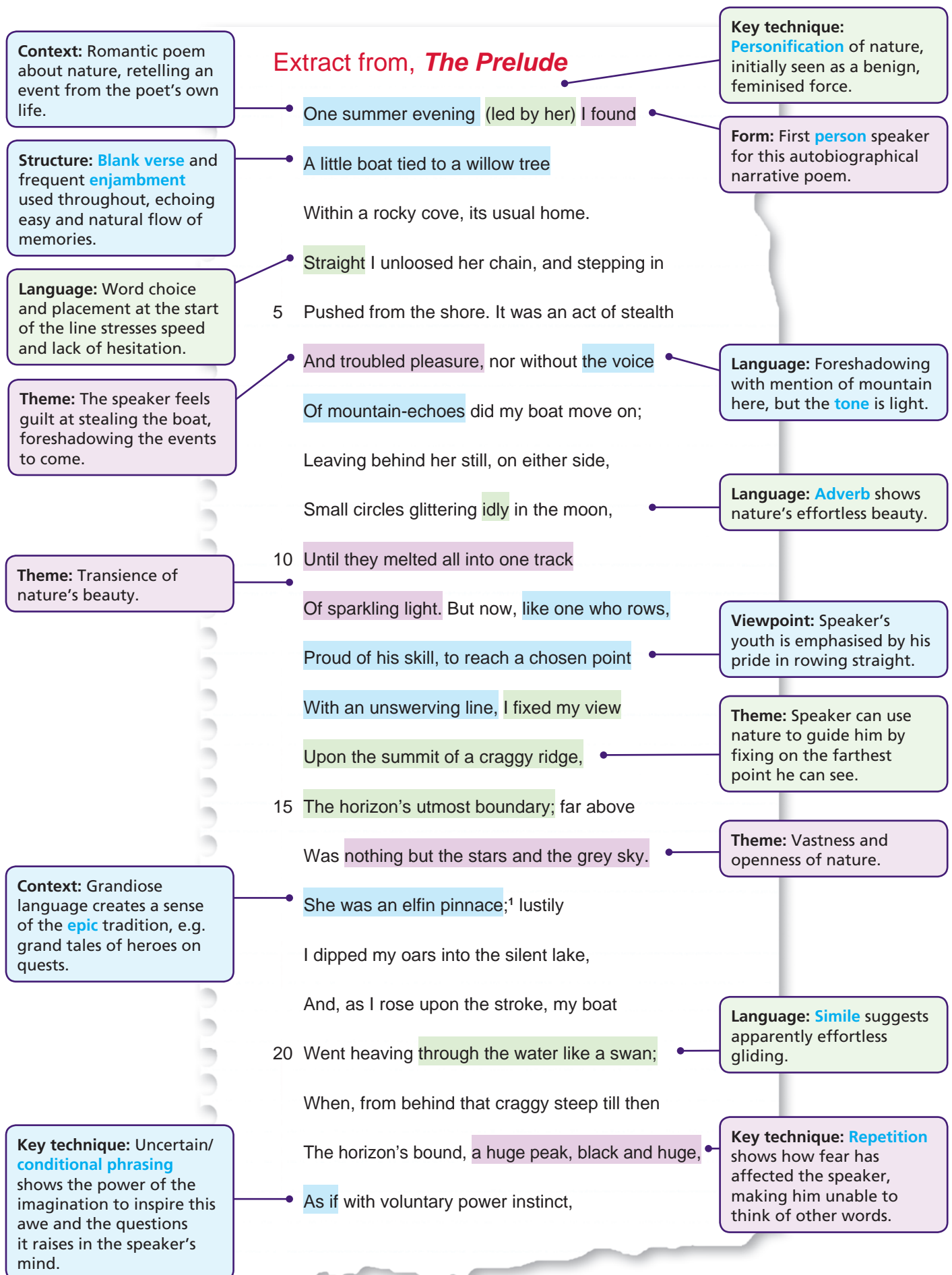


## REVISION FOCUS: EXPLORING THE PRESENTATION OF OPPRESSION



Working through the cluster as a whole, select the poems which discuss the theme of oppression. Create a mind map, table or other diagram to help you compare **how** they present this theme, focusing on the language and poetic techniques used to do this, and their effects. This will help you to get to know the poems and is useful practice for how you need to work in the exam, where you should compare how poets present ideas.





## Glossary

<sup>1</sup> pinnace = a type of small boat

**Key technique:** Personification becomes more threatening and less humanised, lacking gender.

**Theme:** New malign representation of Nature separates the speaker from the stars, a source of light and comfort.

**Key technique:** Here again personification becomes more threatening and less humanised, lacking gender.

**Voice:** Shows how the speaker was affected initially.

**Language:** Nouns form a semantic field of depression to show the effect on the speaker.

**Language:** Return to key word used earlier shows enduring power of fear.

Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,  
25 And growing still in stature the grim shape  
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,  
30 And through the silent water stole my way  
Back to the covert of the willow tree;  
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, –  
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave  
And serious mood; but after I had seen  
35 That spectacle, for many days, my brain  
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts  
There hung a darkness, call it solitude  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
40 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

**Sound:** Harsh consonant cluster/**alliteration** contributes to the frightening effect, **juxtaposing** the power of the mountain and the helplessness of the speaker.

**Key technique:** Uncertain phrasing emphasises imagined nature of the thing, linking to key Romantic theme of power of the Imagination.

**Theme:** Return to the comforting, homely side of nature; see the 'rocky cove' of line 3.

**Language:** **Adjectives** clearly create sense of fear and uncertainty.

**Key technique:** Repetition of negative phrases creates sense of experience haunting the speaker.

**Theme:** Power of imagination – the danger is in his mind. There is also the realisation of how powerless humans are in relation to nature and the world as a whole.

*William Wordsworth (1770–1850)*

## KEY CONTEXT

A03

Wordsworth (1770–1850) is one of the best-known English Romantic poets and was Poet Laureate from 1843, although he refused at first, feeling that he was too old for the post. He grew up in Cumbria, spending most of his life there, and enjoyed considerable poetic success in his twenties. He is credited, together with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with starting the English Romantic movement.

## KEY CONTEXT

A03

'The Prelude' is Wordsworth's great autobiographical poem. It remained unfinished at the time of his death and was published in fourteen books. The extract in the cluster is from the first book, dealing with his childhood.

## SUMMARY

- The speaker comes across a boat and uses it to row into a lake at night, noting the beauty of his surroundings.
- The boy is pleased with his skill in rowing and describes how he fixes his sight on a 'craggy ridge' (14) in the distance.
- A peak behind the ridge appears suddenly, seeming to chase the boy for stealing the boat.
- Frightened, the boy turns the boat around and returns it to its mooring.
- The speaker is haunted by the experience afterwards, unable to recall any pleasant details of his trip.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A** Wordsworth uses a first **person viewpoint** to convey the story directly and to enable the reader to **empathise** with the speaker. Much of the speaker's language is **conversational**, for example the repeated connective 'and'.
- B** **Personification** of nature is used throughout, from 'led by her' (1), which **refers** to the whole of nature as a **personified female**, to the 'huge peak' (22), which is **presented** as a threatening 'it'.
- C** The poem is in the **epic** tradition, as it tells of an adventure, although it is an everyday story rather than a grand quest. In places, Wordsworth uses **fantastical language** that suits this **form**, such as 'elfin pinnace' (17) and 'upreared' (24).



## KEY SETTING: THE LAKE DISTRICT AT NIGHT

A01

Wordsworth presents the reader with realistic descriptions of the lake and its surroundings at night, reflecting the Romantic movement's love of the natural world. Considerable attention is paid to the night sky, whether above the boat, or reflected in the water, which creates a sense of openness and isolation. This sense of space and the sheer size of the open water and sky enables Wordsworth to create a greater shock when the peak seems to rise up and the experience suddenly becomes threatening.

### CHECKPOINT 2

A01

Which word in the first ten lines of the poem tells us that the boy is pleased with his cunning thievery?

## KEY TECHNIQUE: IMAGERY

A02

Wordsworth makes considerable use of **figurative language** to show the power of nature in 'The Prelude'. He focuses the speaker's attention on small details to demonstrate the beauty in tiny things, such as '**Small circles glittering idly**' (9). In this example, Wordsworth chooses the **adverb 'idly'** to emphasise how nature is beautiful in an effortless way. Later in the poem, the '**huge peak**' (22) is personified to demonstrate the physical power of nature in a more forceful way, supported by the **repetition** of '**huge**' and the speaker's frightened reaction.



### TOP TIP

A01

It is important to be able to identify how the poems in the cluster relate to ideas about power and conflict. Go through this poem and trace how Wordsworth sets up the conflict between the speaker and the darker side of nature.

## EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT EFFECTS

A02



You may be asked to write about how Wordsworth presents conflict in this poem. Read this example, which comments on the last part of the poem:

*Clear statement linking technique to effect*

*Shows the meaning of this section in the context of the whole poem*

Wordsworth uses repetition which shows how the speaker cannot stop thinking about what happened: 'No familiar shapes ... no pleasant images.' Through this repeated pattern, Wordsworth emphasises the negative burden weighing on the speaker after his trip – although we know he had a pleasant experience at the start of the boat trip, focusing on the beauty of small details, he cannot remember anything at all positive about it now.

*Apt quotation*

### Now you try it:

Improve this paragraph by adding a concluding sentence or two to draw it together by referencing the idea of conflict explicitly.



**Context:** Set in sixteenth-century Italy and based on a real duchess who died in suspicious circumstances.

**Viewpoint:** Speaker is based on the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso II d'Este.

**Theme:** The Duke mentions Frà Pandolf 'by design', i.e. deliberately, so that he can describe the Duchess's relationship with the man who painted her. The fact that Frà Pandolf was a monk suggests that the Duke's hints at impropriety are unlikely.

**Language:** Positioning of 'only' emphasises his belief that it should be only him who affects her in that way.

**Language:** **Repetition** highlights sense of excess.

**Language:** Exclamatory language, shows strength of his feelings.

**Structure:** Enjambment emphasises the word 'Broke', creating a violent and ominous effect.

## My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not

Her husband's presence **only**, called that spot

15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps

Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff

20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart – how shall I say? – **too** soon made glad,

**Too** easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some **official** fool

**Broke** in the orchard for her, the white mule

**Structure:** **Rhyming couplets** in **iambic pentameter** throughout show strict control of language, yet **enjambment** and **caesurae** create a natural conversational rhythm.

**Form:** **Dramatic monologue** – the Duke is addressing a specific audience (the representative of a court), rather than the reader.

**Theme:** The Duke is presented as controlling access even to the Duchess's image.

**Theme:** Meaning 'if they dared' – shows the Duke's sense of his own importance.

**Structure:** The Duchess's joyful reaction to compliments is **juxtaposed** with foreshadowing of her fate by the vocabulary, e.g. 'dies' and 'throat'.

**Theme:** The Duke saw his wife as not discerning enough, and free with her affections towards other men.

**Theme:** The Duke thinks it's obvious that his attention and wealth are worth more than the beauty of nature.



**Language:** **Vocabulary** emphasises universality of the Duchess's enthusiasm.

**Language:** Longer caesurae and more broken-up lines here convey anger.

**Theme:** Duke thought marrying her was giving her the history or heritage of his name and she should respect that.

**Language:** Vocabulary highlights the Duke's view of the Duchess as an object.

**Language:** The verb shows the Duke's belief that it would be appropriate to teach or train his wife how to behave.

**Theme:** Shows the Duke's arrogance.

**Language:** Ambiguity here – he implies he had her killed, but doesn't quite state it explicitly.

**Language:** Juxtaposition supports idea he had her killed and topic – shift back to the quality of the painting shows him as cold.

**Theme:** Duke's arrogance and societal attitudes to women emphasised – purpose of conversation is to arrange another marriage.

**Theme:** The other art on display also has power and control as its theme.

**Theme:** Social hierarchy is the poem's final note with the name-drop of this fictional artist, which again shows the Duke's pride in his possessions, as the person addressed in the monologue is clearly meant to know who this is.

She rode with round the terrace – all and each  
 30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked  
 Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
 In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let  
 40 Herself be lessened so, nor plainly set  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
 – E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
 The company below, then. I repeat,  
 The Count your master's known munificence  
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

**Language:** **Verb** shows importance of hierarchy.

**Voice:** **Irony** used by Browning as Duke clearly thinks he does have this skill.

**Language:** Verbs show the precision of the Duke's expectations.

**Language:** **Tone** here is almost sarcastic, showing his anger.

**Structure:** Topic shifts from the Duchess here.

**Context:** Some see this poem as critical of social norms regarding Victorian marriage, when dowries were still common.

**Language:** Closing on the first **person pronoun** emphasises his self-centredness and reflects the dramatic monologue form.

**Robert Browning (1812–1889)**

## KEY CONTEXT

A03

Robert Browning (1812–89) was a lover of poetry and art from a young age. He visited Italy in 1838 for research and later returned there after marrying the poet Elizabeth Barrett. His marriage to Elizabeth was somewhat controversial, as she was older than him and her father was opposed to her marrying anyone. Many of Browning's monologues express criticisms of social norms, and these criticisms can also be seen in the way he chose to live.

## SUMMARY

- The speaker, a duke, points out a portrait of his former wife, inviting the implied listener to admire its lifelike quality.
- The Duke implies that his wife may have been flirting with Frà Pandolf, the painter, and it quickly becomes clear that the Duke believed his wife was too friendly or flirtatious with everyone and did not appreciate her husband enough.
- The Duke expresses his belief that the power conferred upon his wife by marriage was highly valuable. He feels that she should have been grateful for this 'gift' (33). He also makes it clear that he did not feel able to explain this to her.
- The Duke hints that he had his wife killed and then discusses meeting the listener's master – a count – whose daughter the Duke hopes to marry.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A The poem is a **dramatic monologue** that presents us with only the Duke's **voice** and point of view, and yet we are still able to discern that his version of events may be **unreliable**.
- B Browning uses **iambic pentameter** in **rhyming couplets**, although he combines this with considerable **enjambment** and **caesurae** to create a **conversational rhythm** that feels informal.
- C Browning presents the Duke as having no '**skill in speech**' (35–6) and uses only a few examples of **imagery** to support this characterisation.

## KEY SETTING: SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FERRARA

A03

This poem is about the Duke of Ferrara, in northern Italy, whose first wife died at the age of seventeen in suspicious circumstances. At that time, and also in Browning's lifetime, women's sexuality was often regarded as dangerous. It was therefore controlled by society through arranged marriages which were likely to be based on family politics and to involve the payment of a dowry (a sum of money or property) by the bride's family to the husband.



## KEY THEME: SOCIAL STATUS

A02

Browning makes it clear that the Duke is upset not just about the Duchess's perceived infidelity; he is also offended by the fact that she seems as content with less materially valuable gifts than the ones his marriage to her has conferred. He accuses her of being 'Too easily impressed' (23), which shows that he feels she should be more discerning. Browning depicts the Duke's irritation at his wife's enjoyment of nature, for example the sunset or a 'bough of cherries' (27), and even her happiness with a 'mule' (28), a lowly creature – not even a horse – to underscore his theme of social status and breeding. In the lines following the references to these gifts (31–2), Browning uses longer caesurae to break up the lines, making the Duke's speech less fluent and representing his anger and loss of self-control.



## CHECKPOINT 3

A01

The Duke has a statue of Neptune which he points out at the end of the poem, 'taming a sea-horse' (55). Who is Neptune?

## KEY QUOTATION: THE POWER OF HIS NAME

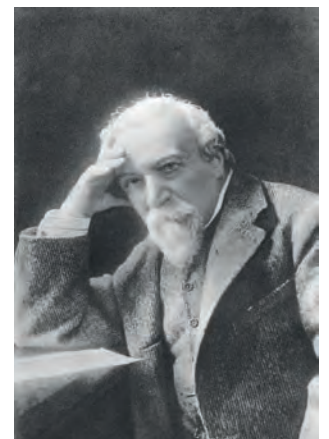
A02

Browning shows the Duke's obsession with the value of his family name and history in the extended description 'My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name' (33), which is made more important by use of the hyphenated **adjective** phrase to emphasise the age of the name. This gives the impression that the longevity of his family line is the most important gift that the Duchess could be given and perhaps implies that he is untouchable because of it. Further, the **verb** 'ranked' (32) emphasises the association with status and hierarchy. Instead of using a verb like 'valued' or 'prized' which has less to do with structure or hierarchy, Browning chooses this specific word with its connotations of grading and levels of worth.

## AIMING HIGH: EXPLORING FORM



Here Browning writes in the dramatic monologue **form**, but other poets in the cluster also use a single speaker in their poems. To achieve the highest grades you will need to explore how the dramatic monologue form differs from simply writing in a single voice, and to think about what makes this poem 'dramatic' and what effect that lends it. For example, the dramatic monologue form lends the poem an immediacy that makes it read like a live action scene, and provides the reader with a deliberately narrow perspective. Browning gradually unfolds a story from which we begin to infer that the Duke's jealousy and displeasure led to his wife's death, although the precise details are left unclear. Further drama also comes from the suggestion that perhaps another hapless woman may share the same fate. How do you think this compares with other poems in the cluster?



Robert Browning

*The Charge of the Light Brigade*

**Structure:** Carefully ordered parts tell the story in a structured way.

**Form:** **Dactylic dimeter** replicates the sound of horses' hooves.

**Viewpoint:** Omniscient narrator tells the story as though they were present at the battle for an audience back home.

**Language:** **Allusion** to Psalm 23 adds religious weight to the soldiers' actions.

**Context:** The Light Brigade famously charged directly towards the Russian guns in the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War in 1854.

**Key technique:** Strong **repetition**, **rhythm** and **rhyme** make the poem memorable.

1.

Half a league, half a league,

Half a league onward,

All in the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

5 'Forward, the Light Brigade!

Charge for the guns!' he said:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

2.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'

10 Was there a man dismay'd?

Not tho' the soldier knew

Some one had blunder'd:

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

15 Theirs but to do and die:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

**Language:** Rhetorical question shows how courageous the soldiers' response is.

**Theme:** Soldiers have little power to choose how to act but demonstrate bravery.

**Context:** As Poet Laureate, Tennyson may not have been able to be too explicitly critical of army leadership.

**Sound:** Repetition and rhythm in these lines emphasise the soldiers' powerlessness and their sense of duty.

3.

Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them,

20 Cannon in front of them

Volley'd and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with **shot** and **shell**,

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the **jaws** of Death,25 Into the **mouth** of Hell

Rode the six hundred.

**Language:** Repetition shows how soldiers are surrounded on all sides.

**Language:** Nature **imagery** implies nature itself is embroiled in the battle.

**Language:** Near-synonyms make these images complement one another, almost implying the landscape or battle is consuming the soldiers.

**Sound:** **Onomatopoeia** for the blasting of the cannon, emphasised by the rhyme scheme.

**Sound:** **Alliteration** emphasises sounds of battle; see also stanza 4 lines 9 and 10.



4.

**Language:** **Imagery** of sight as well as sound.

**Language:** Violent **verbs** highlight soldiers' actions, showing their bravery in battle.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,  
Sabring the gunners there,  
30 Charging an army, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.

**Language:** Repetition of single word creates a pause and slows the pace for this news.

**Structure:** Parallels to stanza 3 show the soldiers' return.

5.

Cannon to right of them,  
40 Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell,  
45 They that had fought so well  
Came thro' the jaws of Death  
Back from the mouth of Hell,  
All that was left of them,  
Left of six hundred.

**Language:** **Vocabulary choices** and alliteration create sense of sympathy.

**Language:** Repetition emphasises the possible dual meaning here – what is left of individuals, as well as numerically left from the total.

**Structure:** Repetition of this line directs the reader's response to the soldiers – they deserve to be wondered at.

**Language:** The only **adjective** attached to this repeated phrase in all six stanzas. It acts as an epithet to indicate how we should see them.

6.

50 When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wonder'd.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
55 Noble six hundred!

**Theme:** Propaganda – Tennyson describes the enemy under attack to show the success/bravery of the Light Brigade, while sanitising their suffering (see line 44, 'fell').

**Language:** Altered prepositions from stanza 3 allow a mirrored structure but also show a deeper connection to the 'jaws of Death' and 'mouth of Hell' than before.

**Language:** Imperative directs the audience's response to the Light Brigade.

*Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)*



## KEY CONTEXT

A03

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–92) was born and grew up in Lincolnshire. He attended Cambridge University but left before completing his degree, because his father died and he returned home to take care of his family. He was successful as a poet throughout his life and became Poet Laureate after Wordsworth's death in 1850.

## SUMMARY

- Six hundred soldiers – the Light Brigade – charge forward, directly towards the Russian guns and into a valley, to engage in a battle between British and Russian troops during the Crimean War.
- In the valley they meet the enemy and are badly disadvantaged, but the soldiers press on bravely, not acknowledging that their leaders have made an error in sending them into this situation.
- The sounds and sights of battle are described, along with the few soldiers who return alive.
- The poem closes with a call to celebrate the bravery of the soldiers.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE POEM

- A Tennyson uses a strong **rhythm** to replicate sounds like horses' hoofbeats and cannons.
- B **Repetition** and **rhyme** combine to make the poem highly memorable.
- C The poem's **structure** carefully presents the battle as a story in six stanzas, with **longer stanzas** for the battle itself and a short **concluding stanza** in which Tennyson makes clear how the reader should respond.
- D Tennyson chooses many active **verbs** to create a very lively poem.
- E Tennyson uses **onomatopoeia** in the deep 'un' of '**thunder'd**' (21), which echoes cannon fire and is repeated through rhymes such as '**hundred**' (17) and '**blunder'd**' (12).

