‘Unseen Poetry’ Sample Exam Question

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on 3 1 *and about 40 minutes on* 3 2 .

Read the two poems, *Yesterday* by Patricia Pogson and *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden. Both poems describe the relationship between parent and child.

3 1 Write about the poem Yesterday by Patricia Pogson, and its effects on you. [15]

You may wish to consider:

- *what the poem is about and how it is organised*
- *the ideas the poet may have wanted us to think about*
- *the poet’s choice of words, phrases and images and the effects they create*
- *how you respond to the poem.*

Yesterday

It seems only yesterday
I balanced a tiny foot
on my palm
and marvelled
that anything
so perfect
could be so small.
Now I can fit my hand in
when I clean your shoes.

I can remember
when I was centered
round you
feeling your feet
strong and determined
testing and strength
of my ribcage
your hard heels
distorting my belly.

Now I wave you off
in the morning
and turn away
to continue
with my work
unhindered by your
eager face
grateful to be able
to make my own pace.
Yet tuned
to your return.

In time the distance
we put between us
will deprive me
of your grace.

Until then
each simple homely act
like rubbing this polish
into your shoes
will focus
my imperfect love.

Patricia Pogson

Exemplar response

Pogson’s poem “Yesterday” is written from a parent’s perspective as they express love for their child. The child is presented as “perfect” in contrast to the “imperfect” mother’s love. Their relationship changes over time as the child becomes more independent and the “distance” between mother and child grows.

At start of the poem the phrase “it seems only yesterday” creates a nostalgic tone and reflects the parent’s perception of the child growing up very quickly. The verb “marvelled” shows the parent watched in amazement at being able to hold her child’s foot in her palm in contrast to the way that the mother’s hand now fits in the child’s shoes.

In the second stanza the mother reflects on being pregnant. The verb “centred” suggests the mother’s life revolved around the child as Pogson describes the sensations of the pregnant mother. The imagery of the baby distorting her “belly” and testing “the strength of my ribcage” shows that even before birth the child is “strong and determined”.

The third stanza marks a change to the present with the word “now” as the parent waves her child off (probably to school) and the mother becomes grateful for the freedom to work “unhindered” without interruption at her “own pace”. However, Pogson also shows the mother misses the child and listens out for and is “tuned” to the child’s return.

At the end of the poem the mother reflects on the child’s kindness and beauty and a future when she will be separated from this “grace”. The mother focuses on the symbolic chore of polishing shoes which is described as a “homely act” and contrasts with the image of the “tiny foot” at the start of the poem. The final line stands out as if it also acknowledges that the parent may not have got everything right but their love is constant although “imperfect”.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows a clear understanding of the poem. The response makes some clear AO2 points about technique e.g. perspective, imagery, verb choice, personification, symbolism. There are appropriate direct references from the poem used to support the candidate’s astute points. Overall this response shows assured understanding of the demands of the task and covers all the Assessment Objectives in a sustained, integrated way.

Vocabulary

Stanza	Simile	Metaphor	Symbolism	Form	Assonance
Imagery	Tone	Narrative Voice	First Person	Structure	Sibilance
Interrogative	Tense	Verb	Alliteration	Repetition	Onomatopoeia

Assessment Objectives

AO1, AO2 are equally weighted for this question

AO1 Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- use textual references, and quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.

AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Tips

- Discuss the main ideas presented in the poem.
- Support points with reference to the poem and refer back to the question set.
- Explain what key words/phrases suggest.
- Track through the poem in order.
- Don’t label or list language features – explain the effect they have.

‘Unseen Poetry’ Sample Exam Question

Now compare *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden, and *Yesterday* by Patricia Pogson.

[25]

You should compare:

- *what the poems are about and how they are organised*
- *the ideas the poets may have wanted us to think about*
- *the poets’ choice of words, phrases and images and the effects they create*
- *how you respond to the poems.*

Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I’d wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he’d call
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love’s austere and lonely offices?

Robert Hayden

Exemplar response

“Those Winter Sundays” is a poem written from a child’s point of view reflecting on the relationship between a father and child. Unlike Pogson’s adult reflection on a child’s growth, Hayden presents a child reflecting on all the things their father did for them as a child or teenager. Both poems refer to polishing shoes. Pogson presents this image as a symbol of love while Hayden presents this as another job in a list of household chores done by the father as he “polished my good shoes”.

Hayden’s poem begins by stressing the repetitive and demanding work of the father as he “got up early” seven days a week “Sundays too” and dressed before warming the house and calling his child to “rise and dress”. The alliteration and colours “blueblack” emphasise the father’s hard work in the cold. The verbs “cracked” and “ached” highlight the impact of “weekday work” and the cold on the father’s hands. In contrast to Pogson’s affectionate and close relationship between mother and child, the relationship between child and father seems colder and more tense. Hayden presents the work of the father as unappreciated as “no one ever thanked him”.

Hayden’s poem highlights a retrospective sympathy and admiration for the father in contrast to Pogson’s admiration of the child. There is a sense of conflict between parent and child in “Those Winter Sundays”. The verbs “splintering and breaking” may describe both the sounds of the house as it warms or the fractured relationship between father and child. The personified “chronic angers of that house” also suggest a tense atmosphere between parent and child which runs into the third stanza and the way that the child (or teenager) speaks “indifferently” without care of affection to their father.

In the final stanza Hayden’s child questions repeatedly “what did I know” to show they had little appreciation at the time of “love’s austere and lonely offices” and the serious, lonely job of parenting.

Both poems suggest parenthood is demanding. Pogson focuses on the physical and emotional impact of motherhood while Hayden suggests that only as adults can children fully appreciate the work that parents do.

Commentary

The opening sentence of the response shows a clear focus on the poem. The response also makes a range of clear points of comparison. The response makes some clear AO2 points about technique – perspective, alliteration, verb choice, personification. There are appropriate direct references from the poem used to support the candidate’s astute points. Overall this response shows assured understanding of the demands of the task and covers all the Assessment Objectives in a sustained, integrated way.

Vocabulary

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AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Tips

- Discuss the main ideas presented in the poem.
- Support points with reference to the poem and refer back to the question set.
- Explain what key words/phrases suggest.
- Track through the poem in order.
- Compare this poem with the first poem.