

**Session Report**  
**1<sup>st</sup> May 2003**  
**Amy Ashenhurst**

**Advanced Reading**

## **Advanced Reading**

The final module in A-level English is an unseen exam. It is a synopsis. It has been suggested it is a kind of paradox as on one hand you have to be original with your response and at the same time you have to support it with evidence from the text.

Sixth formers find this paper difficult and often panic about it and Philip Rush advises following this approach based on John Cage and Composition. References are made through out this report to various poems - all of which are available on this website.

### **Key words:**

**Method**

**Structure**

**Intention**

**Notation**

**Discipline**

**Indeterminacy**

**Inter-penetration**

**Devotion**

**Imitation**

**Circumstance**

### **1) METHOD**

- What method has the writer used to write this?
- Example 1: 'Sonnet' by Shakespeare - in this poem the method is to take something cliched and undermine it or, to be spend a large part of a poem talking about one thing and then twisting it.
- Example 2: 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' - the method here is to take a set of images and mirror them against the reality of death. This clearly sounds so much more sophisticated than simply saying this is a poem about war.
- Advise pupils to start their essays off with an explanation about the method.

### **2) STRUCTURE**

- What holds the poem together or pulls it apart?
- Example 1: 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' - the structure is held together by death and war and peace pull it apart.
- Example 2: 'To Autumn' by Keats - the method here is to take a season and personify it. Here he takes autumn and gives it a consciousness. The structure is based on the chronological movement of the seasons and the idea of birth and death. It appeals to the senses by giving it a sensual flavour.

### 3) INTENTION

- What has the poet succeeded in doing?
- What was their intention?
- Example 1: 'To Autumn' - in this poem Keats' intention is to celebrate autumn.
- Example 2: 'Words for Some Ash' by Thom Gunn - method here is to challenge images of death; structure is dying-death-rebirth (method and structure overlap) and the intention: saying goodbye.

THESE THREE ELEMENTS - METHOD, STRUCTURE AND INTENTION - SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FIRST WHEN TRYING TO GET TO GRIPS WITH AN UNSEEN PIECE OF WRITING.

### 4) NOTATION

- This refers to punctuation, layout, shape, and so on.
- How do these elements contribute to its meaning?
- Example 1: 'Sonnet' by E.E. Cummings - the way this poem is laid out makes it not look like a sonnet. He has exploded a sonnet form and the way he has notated it adds to the meaning of the poem. The poem is comparing thee to the rain and the layout reinforces this idea - it is like rain.
- Example 2: 'A Major Road for Romney Marsh' by U.A. Fanthorpe - the notational devices adopted in this poem are abbreviations, like signposts. Also commentary is given in brackets on the right and the natural description is on the left - this reinforces to the reader the two different ways of thinking.

### 5) DISCIPLINE

- This relates to rhyme, rhythm, assonance, and so on.
- Example 1: 'XXV' by Derek Walcott - in this poem there is one line written with iambic pentameter: 'The lines I love have all their knots left in' and this makes this line stand out, it is important. All the enjambment he uses is disciplined by near rhyme (assonance).

THE NEXT TWO TERMS - INDETERMINANCY AND INTER-PENETRATION - ARE NOT AS VITAL AS THE OTHER FIVE TERMS BUT WILL TAKE WORK TO A NEW LEVEL.

### 6) INDETERMINANCY

- This is all about what you don't know.
- Is the poet deliberately not telling you something? Are they deliberately employing indeterminacy?
- Example 1: 'Last Summer' by Lavinia Greenlaw - we don't know if it is from a man or a woman's point of view. Additionally we don't know whom they are referring to when asking questions and this subsequently leaves the reader asking questions. We don't have to find a solution - some things have changed, others have remained the same. Why does she want us to feel slightly in the dark about these things??? Because it is personal and perhaps she feels in the dark about these things too.
- The key is to be aware that you don't always have to find a solution and interpret it exactly. Sometimes no one knows what a poem means - it is open to personal interpretation.
- If there is a mystery in a poem it is probably there for a reason.

- Example 2: 'Last Hooves' by Ben Rice - who are they? Who is Jerome? Why do they want to shoot him? Why is it his last ride? In this poem we experience feelings of confusion and disorientation, as there is no specific plot. Tenses changing a lot. We are just given a flash of a moment - we don't know what happened before or after. The poet clearly wants us to focus on a specific thing, without giving you details of the plot.

## 7) INTER-PENETRATION

- This concerns ideas going on at the same time in a poem. One idea - or sequence of ideas - can penetrate another set.
- It is skillful to trace the separate threads, which have contributed to the final tapestry of the poem, and to see how the different strands both reinforce and alter the significance of others.
- Example 1: 'The Apparition' by John Donne - the method used here is a goodbye letter to a girlfriend. The intention is to show his rejected love and how his love has turned to hate. The focus is on love and hate and how quickly love can turn to hate - the poet invites us to see how the two are so closely related.
- You can draw threads together at the end of the essay by commenting on the inter-penetration. It should relate to the introduction and should revisit the most important features in the poem.
- Example 2: 'Punishment' by Seamus Heaney - this poem is about corpses discovered in Denmark and the ideas and themes of desire and revenge. He wants to save her but at the same time he wants to condemn her. He is almost confessing that he cannot believe he almost fancies this dead girl from Denmark.

THIS ABOVE LIST - METHOD, STRUCTURE, INTENTION, NOTATION, DISCIPLINE, INDETERMINANCY, INTER-PENETRATION - IS EXCELLENT TO USE WHEN DEALING WITH UNSEENS AND ALSO ON TEXTS YOU ARE CURRENTLY STUDYING.

THE FINAL THREE WORDS SHOULD ALSO BE TARGETTED WHEN STUDYING A TEXT (NOT AN UNSEEN)

8) **DEVOTION** - what we already know about a writer.

9) **IMITATION** - talk/ discuss/ research similar work or style.

10) **CIRCUMSTANCE** - at what time was it written? How might this affect it?

TEACHERS SHOULD TRY TO BRING THESE FINAL THREE ELEMENTS TO A TEXT FOR PUPILS - AS IT IS UNLIKELY THEY'LL KNOW THESE.