



THE DUBLIN
ACADEMY OF
EDUCATION

ONLINE GRINDS PROGRAMME

SAMPLE NOTES ENGLISH

LEAVING CERT (HIGHER LEVEL)

**UNSEEN POETRY
& EMILY DICKINSON**

GAVIN COWZER



ONLINE GRINDS PROGRAMME

Our Online Grinds programmes offer students the opportunity to be taught by our incredible teachers every single week from the comfort of their own homes. We have designed these online programmes based on extensive student feedback regarding how to best deliver online tuition.

These programmes run for 29x academic weeks and contain a blend of pre-recorded and live lessons. Each week, students will receive a new 75-minute pre-recorded video lesson. These pre-recorded video lessons are very beneficial for students as they can pause, rewind and rewatch any of the content they're not sure of. Another benefit to the pre-recorded lessons are that students can watch (and rewatch) them at their convenience rather than being constrained to a timetable. Students will also have access to a full archive of all delivered video lessons which they can rewatch right up until the State Examinations. The pre-recorded video lessons are then supported by additional live online Q & A tutorial sessions with our teachers which facilitate all student queries ensuring they are following the material.

Key information:

- A total of 29x video lessons which are delivered weekly to students via our moodle platform (each weekly video is 75-minutes in duration)
- Students can watch their video lessons, wherever and whenever suits them, they are not constrained to a timetable.
- Students can pause, rewind and rewatch video lessons.
- In addition to the 29x videos, students will have access to regular live online Q & A tutorial sessions with our teachers
- Access to a 5-hour live workshop with our teachers in May 2021
- Hundreds of pages of our study notes which will be delivered in hard copy format to students' homes free of charge
- Regardless of any school closures, all Online Grinds programmes will proceed as scheduled. This is made possible as we have spent the entire Summer pre-recording all the video lessons to ensure these can be delivered whether schools are open or closed.

ON-DEMAND CLASSES

6th Year			
SUBJECT	LEVEL	LOCATION	DATE
Applied Maths	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Biology	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Business	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Chemistry	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Economics	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
English	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
French	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Geography	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Irish	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Maths	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Physics	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Spanish	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards

5th Year			
SUBJECT	LEVEL	LOCATION	DATE
English	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Irish	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards
Maths	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards

3rd Year			
SUBJECT	LEVEL	LOCATION	DATE
Maths	H	Online	Monday 7th September Onwards

FEES

OPTION 1: IN FULL			
	PRICE	TOTAL	SAVINGS
1 subject	€895	€895	-
2 subjects	€495	€1,390	€400
3 subjects	€495	€1,885	€800
4 subjects	€495	€2,380	€1,200
5 subjects	€495	€2,875	€1,600

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Emily Dickinson is one of the 8 Prescribed Poets on the English course. 4 of these poets will be examined in the Leaving Cert.

The Prescribed Poetry section is worth 12.5% of the exam and will be the last section on Paper 2.

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Introduction to poetry and how to study a poem- What your examiner is looking for.

Let's start with the marking scheme all examiners will use to correct your exam...

In particular 2 quotes from their guidelines:

1. *'Students should be able to... read poetry conscious of its specific mode of using language as an artistic medium.'* (DES English Syllabus, 4. 5. 1)
2. *Reward the candidates' awareness of the patterned nature of the language of poetry, its imagery, its sensuous qualities, its suggestiveness.*

Ok so what does this all mean?

Well quote 1 means they are looking for students to understand that poetry is an art form. That language is used to express ideas, thoughts, emotion, feeling, descriptions, moments... (You get the idea).

So, to get a good grade in the Leaving Cert you need to be able to:

- Read (and quote from) the poetry.
- Understand what the poetry is about.
- Express your opinion about how well the poet expressed their thoughts through the language they used.

Now look at quote 2. It specifically lists 4 areas to concentrate on.

- Patterned nature of the language
- Imagery
- Sensuous Qualities
- Suggestiveness

Easy to remember?

Look at the 1st 4 letters: PISS

Now easier to remember?

P is for Patterns

What makes a poem a poem is how it creates patterns.

These patterns can be:

1. The shape of the poem on the page. Think of how a poem looks when you first see it. Why is it organized into stanzas (or not)? Why do certain lines stand out? How does the poem announce itself on the page?
2. The repetition or use of certain words or types of words. Are there groups of words? Words associated with a certain topic/area?
3. Patterns of sound: Think rhythm, beat, rhyme, even words which just sound good. All these contribute to the aesthetic feel of the poem.

So when you read a poem be aware of these patterns. They may be obvious or more subtle, but they will be there.

Frequently repeated ideas and imagery can sometimes be described as a motif. That is when an artist gets fascinated with one part of the world live in.

I is for Imagery

Most of us think of an image as something we see, which is correct. But in poetry think of an image as a moment. In a poem there can be lots of images, or just one or two developed in more detail.

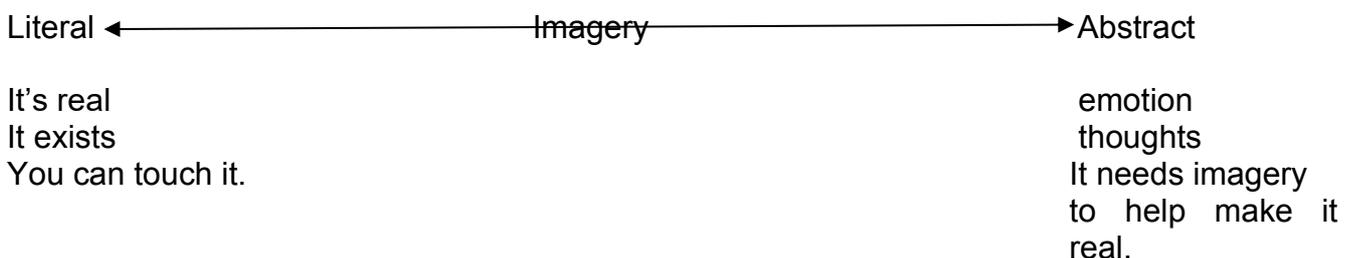
Now, why is imagery used?

Images, moments, descriptions can mean different things to different people. Imagine if I said "father" to a room full of people. Think of the different emotional responses.

Poets enjoy provoking us into seeing things in a new way especially through comparison.

Sometimes it can just simply be used to describe- in other words it is very *literal* (real, it exists). Other times a poet will use imagery to describe an emotion/feeling/thought- in other words the image represents an *abstract* idea/thought.

All you need to do is to explain clearly what the image makes you think about... this is what the examiner loves, a student who "engages" with the poetry.



Poets are often abstract people. What a poem does is to take an abstract idea and make it real (literal) for us through its imagery- we can imagine it.

S is for Sensuousness

Easy. 5 senses:

Sight, sound, touch, taste, smell.

A good poem arouses the senses... Poets particularly enjoy blending two senses in one sentence. That's good description and helps create the right mood/feel to the poem.

When you read the poem try open up your imagination a little- what are you hearing, seeing, feeling etc and can you relate this to your own experience.

Your job in the exam is to comment on how the poet has opened up your imagination- pick out the sensuous images that you felt engaged you.

S is for suggestiveness

A bit more vague. You need to think about what the poet is suggesting to you. Through their words, images, ideas and the overall poem.

This is where you will gain marks in the exam. Both in the unseen poem and in your study of the Prescribed Poets. You need to be clear on your thoughts and elaborate on them with examples and quotes. The key is to be able to explain **how** the poet succeeded in suggesting the ideas that you responded to.

Remember the aim of aesthetic language at all time.

Vocabulary builder:

Finally for now:

Opinion counts. Any poetry question will ask you to express your opinion. But the A grade student is one who is able to explain **how** they have formed their opinion, how the poem has prompted these thoughts and be able to point to elements of the poets technique and writing skills that evoked this response.

How to read any poem:

Read the poem through once-

Ask yourself:

- Who is talking? (The voice- is it the poet, a character, an object)
- What are they talking about? (The subject of the poem)
- What are they saying about the subject? The message of the poem.

Read the poem again. Look out for and think about the following:

- Title – This frames your initial response.
- Structure/Shape- how is the poem structured- Is it divided into stanzas- what happens in each stanza- is there development of the subject matter through the stanzas.
- Vocabulary- what words stand out when you read the poem? Are there any patterns/repeated words?
- Punctuation- is there a lot of punctuation or not- why does the poet want to slow down or speed up the poem through punctuation. Question marks, Full stops, Exclamation marks, Ellipsis...
- Tone- what would the poem sound like when read aloud (sad, happy, angry, depressed, etc.) - the tone will tell you're the writer's attitude to what they are speaking about?
- Main imagery- what is the poet trying to get you to picture/suggest to you through his/her imagery?
- Metaphors/Similes/Personification- what comparisons is the poet using- what are they comparing and why are they making these comparisons?
- Imagery- think of an image as a moment- what moment is the poet trying to get you to imagine- how is he/she doing it- through visual descriptions/ sounds/ smells/ comparisons etc.
- What is the rhythm/beat of the poem- are the lines the same length, does it rhyme, are sounds or words repeated? Does the poet use alliteration/assonance/onomatopoeia etc.?
- For all of the above think of why the poet has chosen to use these.

Note: For what used to be known as "the personal response question" you should do more than just describe your thoughts about the subject matter of the poem. You must also respond to how the poet has constructed the poem and how they have got the message of the poem across. In 2014 in order to force this change the question was changed possibly because it was a Heaney question.

Remember: Poems do not have "hidden" meanings- everything is written on the page in front of you. The poet wants you to discover a meaning/message, they want you to imagine or think about something- just think about what the words images and how they sound are trying to suggest to you.

These ideas or themes are why the poet wrote the poem in the first place. Poets don't use themes they want us to see some aspect of our world in a fresh way. To perhaps share their insight.

Poetry level 2:

Pattern

We have seen that in order to show an awareness of form (pattern) we can discuss:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

We can add another layer to this now.

1. Line break/ Lineation: This is one of the most important differences between poetry and prose. It is what gives poetry its shape after all. Line break can act to change (modify) or amplify the meaning punctuation, sound and rhythm of a poem.

Some effects:

- In poetry line break create a half second pause as the eye searches for the next line. This pause can have an interesting effect. It can create an anxiety as we wait to see what comes next. This is especially pronounced when the poet uses enjambment (when one line does not make sense on its own/ has no punctuation and goes straight into the next line).
- Alternatively a line can be end stopped. This offers completion and reassurance to the reader.
- Line break has an important effect on the sounds of poetry. In formal verse we get end rhyme and regular metre. This gives the poem a comfortable sound. Modern free verse this intrinsic predictable rhythm is dispensed with.

2. Repetition across a poet's work of an image or an idea is referred to as a motif.
3. Poets may sometimes organise sounds to suggest disgust, anger or distaste. Dissonance is a disruption of harmonic sounds or rhythms. Like cacophony, it refers to a harsh collection of sounds; dissonance is usually intentional, however, and depends more on the organization of sound for a jarring effect, rather than on the unpleasantness of individual words. Gerard Manley Hopkins's use of fixed stresses and variable unstressed syllables, combined with frequent [assonance](#), [consonance](#), and monosyllabic words, has a dissonant effect. See these lines from "[Carrion Comfort](#)":

“Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.”

Imagery:

We have examined three ways to approach the imagery in a poem:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1. Poets often make use of their readers or listeners existing store of images. These words then are associated with a further layer of meaning. By referring to these symbols a writer can add complexity to their work. [W.B. Yeats](#) often use symbols when they believe in—or seek—a transcendental (religious or spiritual) reality.
2. Allegory is an extended metaphor form where characters, places, events and objects in a narrative carry figurative meaning.
3. In order to quickly establish the atmosphere in the poem the poet can refer to the time of day the season or even the weather. These acts as symbols for the reader as we associate emotion with different seasons. Pathetic fallacy is therefore a powerful tool at the poet's disposal. This is where the elements mirror what a character is experiencing or feeling.

Sensuousness:

We have seen that poet's achieve sensuousness by blending 2 or more senses in one line. This allows us share the experience of the speaker in the poem.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- Watch especially for if the poem is narrated in the first person. This allows us share the experience even more fully.
- Allied to this be aware of tenses. Past tense is more conventional form as the poet is reflecting on a previous experience. Present tense creates a sense of immediacy.

Suggestiveness:

We have seen that poetry is an aesthetic form of language and as such its purpose is to elicit an emotional response.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Poets describe places in order to share their emotional response to those places. As such when nature is described in a positive way as a place of peace it is often to form a contrast with how the poet feels when denied that peace.

Be aware of how poets aim to appeal to your emotions on a sub conscious level. This is often done through symbols. Sometimes it is ok to refer to an image as being obscure (difficult to understand or explain) yet interesting, upsetting or shocking.

However the Leaving Cert is a test of how well you can verbalise how you formed your opinion. In general select quotes for which you are able to provide an explanation.

2015:

Peter Street

I'd grown almost to love this street,
each time I passed looking up
to pin my father's face to a window, feel myself

held in his gaze. Today there's a building site
where the hospital stood and I stop and stare
stupidly at the empty air, looking for him.

I'd almost pray some ache remain
like a flaw in the structure, something unappeasable
waiting in the fabric, between floors, in some

obstinate, secret room. A crane moves
delicately in the sky, in its own language.
Forget all that, I think as I pass, make it

a marvelous house; music should roam the corridors,
joy readily occur, St Valentine's
stubborn heart comes floating from Whitefriar Street*

to prevail, to undo injury, to lift my father from his bed,
let him climb down the dull red brick, effortlessly,
and run off with his life in his hands.

Peter Sirr

*A relic of St Valentine is kept at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Whitefriar St., Dublin
1. (a) What do you believe is the central message of this poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) Identify two images that you find interesting in this poem. Explain your choices, supporting your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

OR

2. Based on your reading of the above poem, identify the emotions expressed by the poet and explain how these emotions are conveyed in the poem. (20)

What to look out for in Dickinson's poetry

When you first encounter a Dickinson poem it may look very strange and unconventional. This is good. We should value the unique and different in our world. Furthermore the additional effort requires a deeper engagement on the part of the reader and therefore adds significantly to our experience of the poem.

However, when you study Dickinson's poetry it is quite easy to understand if you bear in mind the following points.

1. Unconventional style- her poems look unique on the page. Notice how she uses dashes (think long pauses for thought about what has just been said or is going to be said) and capital letters to emphasize words and phrases. This style is appropriate when we consider how unconventional are the ideas that she wished to express as a poet.
2. Majority of her poems had no titles, most have become well known for their first lines. Why is this? Perhaps she is refusing to allow you to approach the poem with any pre conceived ideas regarding subject matter or theme?
3. Imagery is really important in Dickinson's poems. She uses material and actual events/images to help explore the abstract ideas and emotions she has. The key idea to remember is: using the literal to explain the abstract.
4. Her poetry is concise- it is short but contains a deep level of thought and emotion. Because it is so concise each word is really important, especially those with capital letters. When reading her poetry it is important to think about what her vocabulary actually suggests. What emotional response do the words create?
5. Her poems are very personal (naturally knowing the life she led). But, the ideas she raises are very relevant to us all. This is where you can gain marks in an exam, by discussing how her poems are relevant to you and our society.
6. Her poems are dramatic- the moments she describes are important and interesting.
7. Overall her poetry deals with states of the mind and soul. It is intensely personal on one hand but also very relevant to anyone who reads it on the other as it deals with universal themes of the human condition.

Timing and Marking Scheme

Timing: 50 minutes

Write: Approximately 4 + A4 pages

Include: Quotes and references to at least 4 of her poems.

Marking Scheme:

Purpose- 15 marks

Coherence- 15 marks

Language- 15 marks

Mechanics- 5 marks

Total: 50 marks (12.5% of your overall grade).

Dickinson's Poems on our Syllabus

1. "Hope" is the thing with feathers
2. There's a certain Slant of light
3. I felt a Funeral, in my Brain
4. A Bird came down the Walk
5. I Heard a fly buzz – when I died
6. The Soul has Bandaged moments
7. I could bring You Jewels – had I a mind to
8. A narrow Fellow in the Grass
9. I taste a liquor never brewed
10. After great pain, a formal feeling comes

Hope is the thing with feathers

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune--without the words,
And never stops at all,*

*And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.*

*I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.*

Main points:

- Dickinson defines hope by comparing it to a bird (a metaphor)
- Poem is about hope. Something we all need in times of despair. A personal poem again but deals with an issue relevant to all.
- This poem explores what hope is and explains why it is so important to us.
- By using a little bird we see hope as being fragile and gentle. But, we also see the bird being strong, it never stops and never asks anything of the poet.
- We see hope (the bird) as being sweetest in a storm- a time when you need hope the most, when things are going badly.
- We also see darker images, of times when the mind needs hope. It is an exploration of hope and of our minds.
- A very positive poem- poet is confident that hope is always present, always in our spirit, always available in the darkest times.
- A great contrast to "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain".
- Hope is always there, it doesn't need words. It is primal and within us all. It doesn't need anything.

Technique:

- Look at the two sets of images presented in this poem.
- The first is the imagery of the bird and its song, which represents hope. A bird is gentle, part of nature, it sings and give positivity to the world.
- The second set of images are the dark moments of trouble and hardship- , the "Gale" "storm" "chillest land"- images used to explain moments when we need hope. These are images of shipwreck and storm.
- Dickinson contrasts these images to highlight how there is always hope, it always sings in tune.
- The use of "Me" at the end of the poem- why does she exist? Because of hope.
- Poem moves from the abstract hope to the concrete "Me"

Key quotes:

*““Hope” is the thing with feathers-
That perches in the soul-“*

Combination of definition of hope, linking it to the literal bird and the spiritual soul, the abstract.

“And sweetest- in the Gale- is heard-“

Positive view of hope, there when you need it.

*“I’ve heard it in the chilliest land-
And on the strangest Sea-
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb- of Me”*

Direct voice of the poet. Shows how hope demands nothing but gives so much.

There's a certain Slant of light

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons--
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes--

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us--
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are--

None may teach it--Any--
'Tis the Seal Despair--
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air--

When it comes, the Landscape listens--
Shadows--hold their breath--
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death--

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain

*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading—treading—till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through—*

*And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum—
Kept beating—beating—till I thought
My Mind was going numb—*

*And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space—began to toll,*

*As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here—*

*And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down—
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing—then—*

Main points:

- The main theme/idea is mental breakdown- she uses the metaphor of the funeral to convey mental anguish.
- Poem is about a progressive breakdown where everything gets worse- it is a funeral procession leading to a final sinking.
- But note how poem ends on a dash. It is not definitively over.
- No explanation about the cause of her suffering. The focus is on the mental breakdown.
- The tone of this poem is heavy, suffocating and you get the real sense of being trapped.
- Literal imagery of the funeral helps us to understand mental breakdown. Another example of Dickinson writing very personal poetry but it being relevant and interesting to everybody.
- Unique point of view in this poem- funeral is described from the perspective of the person in the coffin.
- A dramatic portrayal of something that can affect anyone.

Technique:

- The main thing to notice about this poem is the clever use of rhythm- it is regular and intense. This gives the feeling that there is no way out, things continually get worse.
- The words that rhyme all have a long, ominous sound to them which matches the mood Dickinson is trying to create - "Drum, numb" "Soul, toll"
- Why?- on one hand it recreates the ritual and inevitability of a funeral and death, while also helps to create this atmosphere of being trapped, on this horrible pathway to breakdown.
- Again note the religious references in her poem.
- Sound plays an important role in this poem. She builds up the sound- listen to the sound of the words themselves- "treading, beating, creaking, pounding, bell..." They all build up an intensity and dominate the poem and more importantly the poet/victim.
- The use of "And"- creates intensity, a never-ending feeling to the poem- this shows you how even the smallest words can matter in a poem and the skill a poet has.
- Coffin being lowered into the ground symbolizes the moment of breakdown, when reason "snaps"- the pressure has become unbearable and she can resist no longer.

Key Quotes:

"I felt a Funeral, in my Brain"

Highlights perfectly her combination of the literal and the abstract. Note the capital letters for the two most important words. Complex idea expressed so simply.

*"A Service, like a Drum-
Kept beating-beating-till I thought
My Mind was going numb"*

Combines the funeral service with the inner turmoil of the mind.
The mention of service highlights the oppressive nature of the religious ritual- think about Dickinson's attitude to the religious world in real life- she believed in God but did not really partake in the Puritan way of life.

*"As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear
And I, and Silence..."*

Dickinson only able to listen- she is solitary, alone. Only company is Silence.

*"And then a Plank, in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down-"*

The moment of breakdown. Note the combination of literal "Plank" and abstract "Reason".

A Bird Came Down the Walk

*A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angeworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,*

*And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—*

*He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around—
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—
He stirred his Velvet Head*

*Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—*

*Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.*

Main ideas:

- Deals with the relationship between nature and humanity.
- First two stanzas show the bird in its natural environment, aggressive towards the worm, indifferent towards the beetle.
- The poet is spying, not directly involved at first. Later she “offered him a Crumb”.
- See opposites in this poem- bird aggressively eating the angleworm and then politely hopping aside for the beetle.
- The scene is disturbed when she offers him the crumb- human interference with nature- the scene now takes on a greater significance- becomes a metaphor.
- We see many views of nature here. In some ways it can be read as being entirely separate from the human world. On another level the human world is quite like it too. Much of her poetry demonstrates the changing nature of the human mind and spirit.

Technique:

- Again we see the use of a bird as both a literal image and a symbol.
- Note the change in tone and how the poem develops. Initially it seems distant but as the observer (poet) becomes more involved it opens up a little.
- Look at how Dickinson cleverly keeps the pace of the opening lines short to match the movement of the bird.
- Variety of emotion in the poem. At times the bird is aggressive, polite, fearful and finally graceful. Different aspects of nature.
- A powerful use of verbs to convey action and movement- adds to the intense feeling in her poem.

Key quotes:

*A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,*

Nature imagery.
Poet as observer.

*I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—*

*Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—*

Interference of humanity with nature.
Graceful imagery of the bird

I heard a fly buzz when I died

I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heavens of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering sure
For that last onset, when the king
Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away
What portion of me I
Could make assignable,--and then
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
Between the light and me;
And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.

The Soul has Bandaged moments-

*The Soul has Bandaged moments --
When too appalled to stir --
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her --*

*Salute her -- with long fingers --
Caress her freezing hair --
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover -- hovered -- o'er --
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme -- so -- fair --*

*The soul has moments of Escape --
When bursting all the doors --
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,*

*As do the Bee -- delirious borne --
Long Dungeoned from his Rose --
Touch Liberty -- then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise --*

*The Soul's retaken moments --
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the Song,*

*The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue --*

Main points:

- A poem which really sums up much of Dickinson's work. Why- deals with the two extremes of emotion in her poetry. On one hand great exhilaration and freedom, on the other hand fear and feeling trapped. Both of these feelings/emotions run throughout her poetry.
- We see a tension, and comparison here between imprisonment and escape. Think of her own life- always in her room but free in her poetry.
- Poem explores changing states of mind. How our souls are often captured, not free to seek our desires. But the poem also shows us there are moments of freedom.
- Sadly, the conclusion this poem makes is that these moments of freedom are just that, moments and that we end up captive to the horror again.
- Think of the poem as having 3 sections/moments. The first is "Bandaged moments" where the soul is injured. Then the "Soul has moments of escape" where it has freedom, finally "retaken" moments where the souls is captured again and has to face "The Horror".
- Here again we see the poet dealing with a state of mind. She appears vulnerable and trapped. Unlike I felt a Funeral, there are moments of escape.

Technique:

- Personification is a key element of this poem. We see "Fright" having human characteristics, approaching to look at the soul.
- The Soul is female, vulnerable and fearful.
- We see imagery of a strange courtship, as Fright is seen to "caress" the Soul. It is an eerie nightmarish image.
- Note the reference to "Lover hovered o'er"- was this a previous lover who only hovered because the soul was unworthy? Self-doubt? Recrimination? Not worthy of the lover.
- This courtship is mocking, only highlighting the insecurity and need for the Soul to be Bandaged due to injury.
- Then we have a contrast- look at the energy of the verbs as we deal with the "moments of Escape"- "bursting", "dances".
- Also the reference to nature- the bee "Delirious borne" free from the "dungeon"
- Finally the return to doubt, fear etc. Image of the "felon" highlight the soul being treated like a criminal, once escaped it has now been caught again.
- The soul has "shackles" and is trapped, again.
- The final two lines stand alone, highlighting that unfortunately being trapped is the normal state of mind, that we are "led along" and cannot speak of the horror we endure.

Key quotes:

*The Soul has Bandaged moments --
When too appalled to stir --
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her --*

Personification of Soul and Fright.
Outlines the inner state off her mind.
Abstract state of mind is shown through this personification.

*The soul has moments of Escape --
When bursting all the doors --
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,*

As do the Bee -- delirious borne --

Good quote which shows Dickinson's perfect choice of words. "Bomb" creates intensity and explosion of moment. Also look at the verbs.
Use of nature imagery as well. Could link to other poems about nature.

*The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue --*

Great quote to use if ever discussing the darkness of Dickinson's poetry. Works well with the mood of I felt a Funeral.

Also hints at mystery. Much of Dickinson's poetry leaves us wondering at the things unsaid.

I could bring You Jewels—had I a mind to—

I could bring You Jewels—had I a mind to—
But You have enough—of those—
I could bring You Odors from St. Domingo—
Colors—from Vera Cruz—

Berries of the Bahamas—have I—
But this little Blaze
Flickering to itself—in the Meadow—
Suits Me—more than those—

Never a Fellow matched this Topaz—
And his Emerald Swing—
Dower itself—for Bobadilo—
Better—Could I bring?

A narrow fellow in the grass

A narrow fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him,--did you not,
His notice sudden is.

The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,
A floor too cool for corn.
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun,--
When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.

Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality;

But never met this fellow,
Attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.

I taste a liquor never brewed

*I taste a liquor never brewed --
From Tankards scooped in Pearl --
Not all the Vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an Alcohol!*

*Inebriate of Air -- am I --
And Debauchee of Dew --
Reeling -- thro endless summer days --
From inns of Molten Blue --*

*When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove's door --
When Butterflies -- renounce their "drams" --
I shall but drink the more!*

*Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats --
And Saints -- to windows run --
To see the little Tippler
Leaning against the -- Sun --*

Main points:

- Poem of great joy and happiness. Very intense joy being expressed here.
- Some comic images- shows a quirky sense of humour.
- Literal imagery= imagery of drunkenness and liquor.
- For Dickinson nature is a source of endless joy. It is precious and she always wants more "but drink the more".
- But note how it is combined with imagery of nature. - She is drunk on the beauty of summer.
- Abstract idea: How beautiful nature is and how it is heavenly.
- Look at the language and imagery- of drunkenness and excess- how do you think this fits with her Puritan upbringing and the society she is surrounded with- Dickinson rebels against it through her poetry.

Technique:

- Comparison between being drunk and being filled with happiness about the beauty of nature- an unusual comparison.
- Personal poem- use of "I" . However, the topic/theme is a universal theme relevant to everyone who reads it. We can all appreciate nature and the joy it can give us.
- Note the rhyming in the poem- creates a positive rhythm, reflecting her emotions.
- Written in the present tense- makes it more immediate and dramatic.

Key quotes to learn:

*I taste a liquor never brewed --
From Tankards scooped in Pearl --*

Shows the personal nature of the poem.
Develops literal drunken imagery
Note the reference to Pearl- this shows us nature is precious.

*Inebriate of Air -- am I --
And Debauchee of Dew --
Reeling -- thro endless summer days --*

Links the literal (liquor/drunken) to the abstract (summer days)
Shows us her joy, her excessive nature, wanting more.
Very positive, "endless summer days".
Note alliteration "Debauchee of Dew"- speeds up line, brings energy.

*When Butterflies -- renounce their "drams" --
I shall but drink the more!*

Dickinson wants more here- she is so filled with joy.

After great pain, a formal feeling comes --

After great pain, a formal feeling comes --
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs
The stiff Heart questions, was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round --
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought --
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone --

This is the Hour of Lead --
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow --
First -- Chill -- then Stupor -- then the letting go --

.

Sample Essay Plan and Structure

Essay question: ***Write a personal response to the poetry of Emily Dickinson***

Introduction:

Hook: Personal observation/quote/interesting point etc. Something to arouse the reader's interest. E.g. What struck you first when you read her poems? Or what were you expecting after you read her biography? Maybe a quote that sums up her poetry for you? For each poet you should have 2/3 opening hooks ready.

Thesis: What interests you about her poetry in one or two sentences.

Points: A brief elaboration on your thesis.. a little further information hinting at the points you will make.

Point 1:

Point: Unique style

Explanation: punctuation, capital letters etc.

Example:

Point 2:

Point: Clever ability to use the literal to explain the abstract.

Explanation: Use of imagery to explain complex emotions. How this made it simple, easy to understand.

Example:

Point 3:

Point: Enjoyed the intensity of her poetry

Explanation: Intense emotional experience. Dealt with major human issues in a very interesting way

Example:

Point 4:

Point: Enjoyed how her poetry was extremely personal but dealt with issues relevant to everyone.

Explanation: Appreciation of nature, mental breakdown, hope etc.

Example:

Conclusion:

Here you need to finish with a flourish. Not just a summation of your thoughts but a final moment of appreciation and realization. Answer the question one last time but make your final sentence sum up what you learnt/appreciated most about the experience of reading and studying her poetry.

Past and probable questions

2005

What impact did the poetry of Emily Dickinson make on you as a reader?

Your answer should deal with the following:

Your overall sense of the personality of the poet

The poet's use of language/imagery

Refer to the poems by Emily Dickinson that you have studied.

2011

"Emily Dickinson's original approach to poetry results in startling and thought-provoking moments in her work."

Give your response to the poetry of Emily Dickinson in the light of this statement. Support your points with suitable reference to the poems on your course.

Other questions:

"Emily Dickinson's work combines simple imagery with intense emotion"

Discuss the above statement with reference to the Dickinson poetry you have studied.

"Economy of expression, an original point of view, and unusual imagery are qualities that enhance the poetry of Emily Dickinson"

"In her poetry Emily Dickinson portrays a conflicting world, full of beauty and despair"

"Emily Dickinson is more notable for the unique style of her poetry rather than the content."

Do you agree with this statement?

"Dickinson is a unique poet, characterized by her unusual style and interesting view of the world. "

Sample Essay answer

“Dickinson is a unique poet, characterized by her unusual style and interesting view of the world.”

One of the first things that strikes any reader when they look at a Dickinson poem is the unique way it announces itself on the page. My first thought when studying her poetry can best be described through a quote from Dickinson herself – “Here’s freedom”. While this phrase was used by Dickinson to describe the freedom she felt in her room in Amherst I felt there was a real sense of freedom in her poetry as she cast off the rules of punctuation and grammar to express her ideas. It is these ideas and the view of the world that she brought to her poetry that really spoke to me as I read her poetry. It is an intense view of the world, full of joy and horror. What also interested me was how this world was not just outside her window in Amherst in the 1800’s but the more complex world of her inner thoughts. I found this fascinating as I got a real insight into Dickinson’s world and her mind.

What is it about her style that I found unique and unusual? The most obvious characteristics of her style are her use of the dash and capital letters. When I first read her poetry I was intrigued how she used the dash to create a pause for thought. It made me realize there can be so much more to poetry than just words and phrases she used. The dash creates such drama in ‘*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*’ when we read the line “kept beating- beating- til I thought my mind was going numb”. The powerful dash really emphasizes the beating and the anguish she was going through. In the same poem if you look at many of the words which have capital letters; Funeral, Brain, Mourners, Sense, Box, Soul it really helps the reader to understand the theme of the poem and also contributes to the oppressive and sinking atmosphere of the poem.

What I found most interesting and unique about her style was how she used concrete and literal images to explain human emotions and conditions. Her use of a funeral service to describe mental and emotional breakdown was very unusual but very appropriate. The image of the mourners “lift a Box and creak across my Soul” and “then a Plank in Reason broke” is a very unique and visual way of describing this mental breakdown. In stark contrast to these depressing images her comparison of hope to a bird in ‘*Hope is the thing with Feathers*’ could not be more simple or appropriate. The idea of hope being a bird “that sings the tune without the words- And never stops- at all” is a very positive and uplifting image, but most importantly one that shows how clever Dickinson was at taking an abstract idea and making it realistic for the reader.

Perhaps the most unique set of images that she used was where she compared being drunk with the joy she got from the beauty of nature in ‘*I taste a liquor never brewed*’. When I first read it I was immediately struck by how unusual this comparison was, especially when you think of the Puritan world that she lived in. What a clever comparison to make. On one hand easy to understand, but on the other it is rebellious and unique. Even in today’s world drunkenness is seen as something to be shunned and ashamed of. Dickinson subverts this idea and produces a poem with great optimism and an intense feeling of happiness.

Another unusual thing about her poetry was the intensity and drama in each of her poems. Through her imagery, and use of verbs in particular she managed to create real drama and intense emotion in each of the poems I studied. I really enjoyed how she built up the drama of the moment in ‘*A bird came down the walk*’ through her use of short sentences and the dash in the opening stanzas. Even such a simple quote as “He glanced with rapid

eyes that hurried all around” adds to the drama of the moment she is describing. Perhaps the most intense and even horrific moment in the poems I have studied was the moment in ‘*The Soul has Bandaged moments*’ when “Fright “tries to “caress her freezing hair”. When I read this first I got a chill almost as if I was watching a horror movie. The development of this idea to include the Soul being “led along, with shackles on the plumed feet, And staples, in the Song, “ as “The Horror, welcomes her, again” is probably one of the most intense images I have encountered in my study of poetry, and really challenged my view of the world and the human soul.

Her view of the world changed in the poems I read. I found her view of hope in the world very uplifting in ‘Hope is the thing with feathers’. The idea that hope can survive in “the chilliest land- And on the strangest Sea” is a very positive view of the world to portray. And the sheer joy that is expressed in *I taste a liquor never brewed* as she will “but drink the more” and be a “Debauchee of Dew” cannot but lift any reader’s spirits.

In contrast I found her view of the world in ‘The Soul has Bandaged moments’ quite depressing at times. The idea that the soul only has “moments of escape” and will end up “with shackles on plumed feet” is both interesting and unique. Yet it still leaves me with a sadness to think that this is what Dickinson thought.

When I reflect on my study of poetry I find it fascinating to think that all of her poetry was written in isolation, living as a recluse in her room. She was a unique individual, but more importantly a unique poet, whose poetry speaks to us even today. This is the most impressive thing about her poetry. Here was a poet, who was able to rebel against all that she would have been taught about poetry, grammar and punctuation. She created a unique style that has made her poetry recognizable and instantly unique. But even more impressive and interesting is the view of the world she was able to create: a world full of drama, despair and joy. It is ironic that the inner world that she created, on one hand so personal and private can be so relevant and interesting to all who read her poetry. That is what makes her unique: her ability to speak to the world, to get us to think of the human mind and spirit, and all from a little bedroom in Amherst. As she said herself, “here’s freedom”.

Important points on Emily Dickinson's Background.

- Born in Amherst in 1830, Dickinson spent her entire life in and around this small town.
- Considered one of the most original poets of the 19th century. Why? Unique appearance of her poetry and her combination of literal imagery with abstract thought/emotion.
- Dickinson's bedroom window faced towards a local cemetery in Amherst. As a young girl she observed burials on a regular basis. Life and death would have clearly been in her thoughts.
- The principal of her school remembers her as "very bright, but rather delicate and frail looking..an excellent scholar"
- After secondary school Dickinson attended a female seminary, but left after one year in 1848. There are many theories why she left: homesickness, poor health, and perhaps a refusal to sign a confession of her faith in Christ.
- After this she stayed in Amherst. She remained religious, but did not worship in any public way. "Some keep the Sabbath going to church- I keep it staying at home".
- Apart from 10 months at boarding school and a few brief visits to nearby cities she spent her entire adult life at home, mostly in her room. She died in 1886.
- She once described her locked bedroom as "here's freedom" and also once wrote "to shut our eyes is to travel".
- Emily Dickinson wrote over 1800 poems (extremely prolific. Aimed at expression rather than perfecting her work.); however, less than a dozen were published during her lifetime. Even then, her poetry was likely changed (as was not unusual during the 19th century) as publishers saw fit. After her death in 1886, Dickinson's poetry began to be published (1890 originally).

Emily Dickinson

1830–1886

<http://www.edickinson.org>



Assessment and Contribution:

Emily Dickinson is one of America's greatest and most original poets of all time. She took definition as her province and challenged the existing definitions of poetry and the poet's work. Like writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, she experimented with expression in order to free it from conventional restraints. Like writers such as Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she crafted a new type of persona for the first person. The speakers in Dickinson's poetry, like those in Brontë's and Browning's works, are sharp-sighted observers who see the inescapable limitations of their societies as well as their imagined and imaginable escapes. To make the abstract tangible, to define meaning without confining it, to inhabit a house that never became a prison, Dickinson created in her writing a distinctively elliptical language (deliberately obscure) for expressing what was possible but not yet realized. Like the Concord Transcendentalists whose works she knew well, she saw poetry as a double-edged sword. While it liberated the individual, it as readily left him ungrounded. The literary marketplace, however, offered new ground for her work in the last decade of the 19th century. When the first volume of her poetry was published in 1890, four years after her death, it met with stunning success. Going through eleven editions in less than two years, the poems eventually extended far beyond their first household audiences.

Emily Dickinson died in Amherst in 1886. It was not until R.W. Franklin's version of Dickinson's poems appeared in 1998 that her order, unusual punctuation and spelling choices were completely restored.