TEACHING The Language of Poetry

EDU 3216
Program Bacelor Pendidikan (TESL)
Unit 1 – 3/5

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Juridah Md Rashid is a lecturer at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia since 1987. She has taught in secondary school before joining the university. She teaches Literature and Theatre courses at the faculty. Juridah Md Rashid is also the module writer for EDU 3208 Teaching Literature in ESL and EDU 3215 Teaching the Language of Novels.
Institute for Distance Education and Learning  
(IDEAL)  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

COURSE SYNOPIS

EDU 3216 TEACHING THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY

This course offers the study of poetical forms from various literary traditions; works of major poets; themes in poems; critical and literary appreciation of poems; the language of poetry and pedagogy of teaching poetry.
Introduction to the Course

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to understand and teach several poems from several literature traditions and form awareness on the language and poetic forms.
Text Prescribed


EDU 3216  TEACHING THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY

Contents

Unit 1  Examining various poetic forms.
Unit 2  Exploring the language of poetry.
Unit 3  Critical study of selected poems from various literary traditions.
Unit 4  Writing Poems
Unit 5  Utilising poems as teaching resource in a language classroom
         Teaching poems in the literature classroom.
Introduction to this Study Guide

- The material you read in this booklet is meant to act as a guide to the prescribed texts, as well as to the readings recommended or provided.

- This guide provides a framework of the important points, which you should use to lead you in your study. It is only a guide to point out important and relevant issues.

- The topics in the guide are presented as unified learning materials from the introduction to in-depth study on various aspects of the subject.

- At the end of every section, there are a number of questions, which help assess your understanding of the topic. Work through these questions, as they will help apply what you have read and learned.
Learning Activities and Learning Tasks

In each section of this study guide there is a 'About the poem' components and 'Study the following questions' component. To fully understand the course material you should attempt and work through both the components.

After you have read the required materials for the section answer the questions. If you have difficulty responding to the questions, review the material you have read and also read any other related materials from the recommended books.
## Study Schedule

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Assessment

The assessment for this course will be as follows:

Theme Paper/Teaching Activities  20%
Writing Poems  20%
Mid Term Examination.  30%
Final Examination  30%

Submission of written assignments

Deadlines for the assignments are as follows:

The first assignment must be submitted during the 6th week of the semester.
The second assignment must be submitted during the 10th week of the semester.

Submit your assignments to the officer of Yayasan Pelajaran MARA during the face-to-face sessions or send them to the following address.

Kolej Pendidikan Lanjutan
Yayasan Pelajaran MARA
No. 17, Jalan 6C/91
Taman Shamelin Perkasa
Jalan Cheras
56100 Kuala Lumpur
Mid Semester Examination

For mid semester examination you are to study the following poems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily Dickinson</td>
<td>After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes</td>
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<td>Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister</td>
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<td>Langston Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Nortrup</td>
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<td>Dorothy Parker</td>
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<td>Carl Sandburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dylan Thomas</td>
<td>A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do Not Go Gentle in That Good Night</td>
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Final Examination

Study the following poems for your final examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poets</th>
<th>Poems</th>
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<tr>
<td>William Butler Yeats</td>
<td>Sailing to Byzantium</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Wild Swans at Coole</td>
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<td>John Keats</td>
<td>Ode on a Grecian Um</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ode to Nightingale</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To Autumn</td>
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<td>Sonnet: Bright Star</td>
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<td>Matthew Arnold</td>
<td>Dover Beach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilfred Owen</td>
<td>Anthem for Doomed Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Blake</td>
<td>The Tyger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Herrick</td>
<td>Here a Pretty Babv Lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Sir Patrick Spens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
<td>The Man He Killed</td>
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<td>Christina Rossetti</td>
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<td>William Shakespeare</td>
<td>Sonnet 30: When to the Sessions of Sweet</td>
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<td>Sonnet 55: Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments</td>
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POETRY

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
It, after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
That can dilate, hair that can rise
If it must, these things are important not because a
High-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
a tree, the innumerable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a
flea, the base—
ball fan, the statistician—
not is it valid
to discriminate against ‘business documents and
school-books’; all these phenomena are important. One must make a dis-
tinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is
not poetry
nor till the poets among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present
for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

—Marianne Moore
UNIT 1  What is Poetry/Poem?

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to:
1. Recognise components of poems.
2. Identify poetic devices use in poems.
3. Recognise and able to explain the form of a poem

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant...The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid – it may even be better.

T.S. Elliot (1957)

Poetry derives from a Greek verb which means to make. Poetry are words organized into fixed lines which will be further organized into regular units called stanzas. In poetry the length of the line is a part of the art form. The lines are used to create rhythmical effects or sound patterns. Lines are used by poets to construct image, rhythm and sound. By controlling the line length, poets also control the shape of the poems.

The other three characteristics of poems are sound devices, rhythmical patterns and compression of statement. The use of sound is very important to most poets. Rhyme is the linking of two or more words by matching final sounds, alliteration by matching the initial consonants or assonance and consonance, the matching of sounds within words. In addition, onomatopoeia is the sound of words that echoes what it describes as in “buzz”, or “hiss”.
Rhythm is a systematic variation in the flow of sound. The most common form of rhythm is the traditional metre which uses a fairly regular repetition of stressed and unstressed syllabus. Quantitative meter depends not on stress but on the length of duration in the pronunciation of a syllable. There are also nonauditory rhythms. These rhythms are achieved by patterning the number of syllabus in each line regardless of stress, by balancing syntactical elements, by repeating key words and phrases, and by arranging the length of lines. Rhythm in poetry is considered a heartbeat, giving poetry a special kind of life.

Poetry compresses statement. It says a lot in a few words. Most poems have a range of suggestions with subtle shadings of feeling. The subjects found in poems are of poet's own personal experience. Poetry then is distinguished from other type of writing by its special use of the line, the sound of words, the rhythm of phrases and the compression of suggestion.
What are the different types or categories of poetry?

Types of Poems

Poems can be classified into several categories or types. The individual is identified by its form and the way the poem is patterned in concept or idea. Each category or type has its own unique elements. Knowledge on the different types or categories can help a reader in his work of analysis.

Epic

Epic presents the great deeds of a heroic figure or group of figures. Examples of epic are Homer's Odyssey and Iliad, and Milton's Paradise Lost.

Free Verse

Free verse is a form used in modern poetry. Free verse abandons rhyme and it is a fairly recent innovation. Free verse is written in irregular lines and without fixed metre. To grasp the significance of free verse, the other forms of verse are based upon regular metrical pattern. Most of the common English poetry is written in ten-syllable line, with five stresses in each line, which is called iambic pentameters. Free verse becomes very common in the twentieth century especially, in the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Williams, Wallace Stevens and D.H. Lawrence.

Blank Verse

Blank verse is an unrhymed poetry, but a very disciplined verse form in which each line is an iambic pentameter (a ten-syllable line with five stresses). Blank verse is close to rhythm speech and is stylised enough in its regularity to be quite distinct from speech or prose. It appears less formal than a poem that rhymes. Blank verse is a good medium for long narrative poem that tells a complicated story or explores experience in a fairly comprehensive way. This type of poetry allows the poet to maintain variety by shifting the pause in the line and by using run-on lines in the verse paragraph.
Ballad

A ballad is a song that tells a story, usually about someone. Ballad was first written to be sung as love songs. It is one of the oldest forms of English poetry. The ballad is usually written in stanzas of four lines. Ballad uses devices such as repetition, as in a song. The subject matter is usually romantic love, nature and love of nature and natural things.

Metaphysical poetry

Metaphysical poetry is a term used to refer to work of John Donne and other seventeenth-century poets. Metaphysical poets write about conventional subjects esp. secular and divine love. The poem is about disorder of experience set against the redeeming quality of love. It also places greater emphasis on how difficult it is to make sense of experience.

Heroic Couplet

Heroic couplet is a pair of ten-syllable lines that rhyme. A poem as a whole can be written in a sequence of heroic couplets. This technique first used by Chaucer and later by Shakespeare, Browning

Lyrical Ballad

Lyrical Ballad marks the starting point of romantic poetry. In Lyrical ballad, the poet turns to nature and away from social and intellectual sophistication. The seventeenth and eighteenth century poet use this form. Most poems are by Wordsworth and Coleridge’s ‘The Ancient Mariner’ in which poets offer their response to the experience presented.
Lyric Poetry

Lyric originates from Greek words meaning a poem written to be sung. Lyric is a short poem expressing the thoughts and feeling of a single person. Lyric is usually written in the first person ("I will arise and go now, and go to Inisfée" – from Lake Isle of Inisfée – a poem prescribed for the lower forms in literature component).

A lyric might also describe an object or recall an experience without the speaker ever bringing himself or herself into it.

Elegy

Elegy is a poem written on the death of a friend of the poet. The purpose is to praise the friend. But death prompts the writer to ask, ‘If death can intervene so cruelly in life, what is the point of living? By the end of the poem, the poet will have come to term with his grief. The elegy has no fixed length or stanza form. An example of elegy is Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam’ (1830)

Villanelle

The villanelle is a poetic form that consists of nineteen lines divided into five three-line stanzas called tercets and a final four-line stanza called a quatrains. All of the lines in villanelle use only two end rhymes. With the rhyme scheme following the pattern: aba ababa ababa. In addition, almost half of the poem is made of repeated lines: Line 1 is repeated in lines 6, 12, and 18. While line 3 is repeated in lines 9, 15, and 19. “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” is considered as the most famous modern example of a villanelle.
Dramatic Monologue

Dramatic poetry presents the voice of an imaginary character speaking directly without any additional narration by the author. Dramatic poetry refers to dramatic monologue, a poem written as a speech made by a character. It is usually addressed by the speaker to some other character who remains silent.

Robert Browning, a Victorian poet, developed the form of dramatic monologue. He liked to put words in the mouths of characters that were conspicuously nasty, weak, reckless or crazy. An example of dramatic monologue “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” by Robert Browning. In this poem the speaker is an obsessively proud and jealous monk.

Robert Browning also wrote the famous dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess”. In this poem, the poet creates a Renaissance Italian Duke (an imagine speaker) whose words reveal more about himself than aristocratic speaker intends. The duke addresses a representative of the girl he wants to marry. He talks about his dead wife. As we read we assess his character and he unconsciously reveals himself as a tyrant who could not tolerate his wife’s independence.

The monologue is colloquial following the speaker’s voice. All monologue present one person’s response to life and many poets offer their personal view. On the other hand, Browning in his dramatic monologue does not present his view but that of an imaginary character.

Haiku

Haiku means ‘beginning verse’ in Japanese. It is a lyric poem based on a Japanese form. It has three lines that usually use seventeen syllables. The most often syllables forms being used is 5/7/5, but 4/5/8 is also frequently used. Haiku often expresses feelings or observations about nature. Haiku consists if a stanza of regular rhyme scheme: a b a.
Sonnet

The word ‘sonnet’ originates from an Italian word ‘sonetto’ which means ‘little song’. A sonnet is a fourteen line poem usually written in praise of someone or something. There are two types of sonnet. The first type is called Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. The poem is divided into two parts: a) eight lines (octave) and b) six lines (sestet). Anthem for Doomed Youth by Wilfred Owen is an example of Petrarchan sonnet.

The second type is English or Shakespearean sonnet. Shakespearean sonnet is divided into three quatrains and a couplet. A quatrain is a unit of four lines, and a couplet is a unit of two lines. The poet introduces his theme or subject matter and then develops them in the quatrain. A change of idea or a twist, or surprise is introduced in the last couplet. The poet also may introduce a slight change in thought or idea between the second and third quatrains. The rhyme scheme for a Shakespearean sonnet is abab cdcd efef gg.

Sonnet 30 and 55 are examples of Shakespearean sonnet or English sonnet.

Narrative Poem

A type of poetry sometimes rather long, that tells a story. A ballad is an example of a narrative poem.

Limerick

A humorous poem that consists of five lines with fixed rhythm and rhyme.

Ode

Ode is a long lyric which is serious in subject and tone. The ode is written to praise or glorify someone. It is also written as a meditation on a private problem or a general human predicament.
Study the following questions

1. Discuss the different forms of poems.

2. Give an example for each of the poetry forms

3. Write one haiku and one limerick. These two forms of poems are considered one of the shortest poetic forms.
UNIT 2  TERMS IN POETRY

Performance Objective

Students would be able to:
1. Identify poetic devices use in poems
2. Explain the different poetic devices use in poems.

In studying poetry, a reader needs to have knowledge on the basics of poetry analysis and a number of poetic devices that poets use to convey meaning. It is advantageous for a reader to understand the following terms in the analysis of poetry. Please refer to these terms each time you are confronted with a new poem.

Theme

The general idea of what the poet is trying to convey to you. Themes are important because they let you know just what the poet intends to say through his poem.
Rhyme

Rhyme is part and parcel of poetry. Rhyme is the repetition of like sounds in different words, especially in the last syllables and when the words are physically near one another. Rhyme makes words easy to remember and it sounds lyrical.

There are three different types of rhymes. End rhymes are the most common type of rhymes. This means that the words at the end of the lines rhyme with each other. One of the first things a student would do when analysing poetry is to look for the poem’s rhyme scheme.

The next type is the internal rhyme. Rhyme can also occur within a line of poetry itself. Internal rhyme occurs in the next rhyming pairs. *Cloud/shroud* and *night/white*.

The final type of rhyme is the half-rhymes or imperfect rhymes or near rhymes. This occurs when the sound of two words is similar but not exact. Instances of near rhyme occurs in the following pairs; *stop/shot* and *heart/art*.

Stanza

A group of lines repeated in similar groups throughout a poem.

Verse

A single line of poetry, or poetry in general, usually poetry that has rhythm and rhyme.
SOUNDS

Poetry is meant to be read and to be heard. It is made up of musical sounds and because of this we need to know how poets arrange the sounds to make beautiful poems. One of the ways to do this is by repeating certain sounds. The techniques that the poet uses are: alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and consonance.

Alliteration

This term means the repetition of consonants especially at the beginning of words that are close to each other usually as the first sound in a group of words. The repetition of the initial consonants gives a definite musical and rhythmic effect.

An example on the usage of alliteration is abundance in the first line of sonnet 30 by William Shakespeare (a poem prescribed for this course)

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:

Assonance

This is the repetition of identical or related vowel sounds in words that are close together.
Onomatopoeia

This term applies to the effect of words whose sounds seem to resemble the sounds they describe or words that echo the sense of the words or objects. It is the suggestion of a particular sound by means of a word. Examples of words are: splash, rattle, meow and quack.

Consonance.

The repetition of consonant sounds. For example: “The snake hissed and slithered slowly through the grass.”

Cliché

Cliché is a word or phrase that has been used so many times that it has lost its original impact and is now stereotyped and too familiar. Examples of cliché are: Red as a rose, tried and true, happy as a lark.

Imagery

Imagery is the use of words that appeal to your senses. Poet uses a lot of images in his poetry to share with the reader things about life and make us see, hear, feel, taste, or smell what is being described. Imagery is used when poets want to make their images more striking and appealing to our five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.) Images may be literal (“The sun was hot-yellow”) or imaginary (“The sun’s stare turned me into jello”). Imagery is another name for a group or cluster of images (word pictures).

An example of a poetry that uses imagery is Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams.
Irony

Irony has to do with two levels of meaning. The use of words or situations to dramatically contrast what is expected and what is really meant or what actually occurs. The simplest form of irony is sarcasm, comments that say one thing but imply something else, usually just the opposite of what is said. One level of meaning is what the words say; the other level of meaning is what you and the listener think about the subject you are discussing. Sarcasm is often used to mock someone or something.

Another type of irony has to do with situation in which there are two levels of meanings. The two levels of meaning that irony brings give the poem depth and interest.

FIGURE OF SPEECH

Figures of speech are expressions that are not to be taken literally. It also refers to the changing of word order or meaning of words in order to gain greater impact upon the meaning. Some figures of speech are similes, metaphors, symbols, personifications, synecdoches and, metonymies,

Simile

Similes are also important and considered as the heart of poetry. Similes use like or as or than in making a connection between two different things. Poets use simile for vivid imagery in their poems and also for effective and convenient way of comparing things.
Metaphors

Metaphors are important and considered as the heart of poetry. They are more interesting than simile they are bolder. They are a type of figurative language in which comparisons are made to things that are basically different. Metaphor make a direct comparison and does not use like and as.

An example of the following metaphor is from Ode to Autumn by John Keats (one of the prescribed poems for this course)

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch- eaves run;

Personification

Personification takes the metaphor a step further. This is another type of figurative language where an inanimate or abstract object is given the characteristics/traits of human qualities or animate object.

Synecdoche

A figure of speech in which part of an object is used to represent the entire object.

Ex.: “hired hands” “set the table”
Voice and tone

Tone is like a voice in the poem. It is the author’s attitude toward his or her subject. It is easier to identify the tone if you ask yourself who is speaking in the poem or what the voice is saying. Tone can be identified through the words that the poet uses, the description he makes, and even the way he develops his ideas.

The poet is not always the one who is speaking in the poem. Voice, persona, or speaker in the poem is not always the poet. After reading a poem, you sometimes feel that the persona is voicing out his anger, or that the persona is trying to share a very intense feeling with the readers.

In the following poems, the speakers refer themselves as “I”. State what the “I” is like and how do you come to that conclusion.

Robert Browning’s ‘My last Duchess’ and Emily Dickinson’s ‘There’s been a death in the opposite house’ (poem prescribed for form 4 students in the literature component)

The tone of a poem is often determined by the poet’s use of sound. Note whether the consonantal sounds soft, the vowel sounds drawn out? Or are the consonantal sounds harsh, the vowel sounds short. To get the feel for the tone of a poem, read poems aloud and listen to the sounds the words make.

Mood and atmosphere

These terms refer to the general feeling created in the poem. Mood is the inner feelings and frame of mind. Atmosphere refers to the feeling or sense of what’s happening in the outer world. Both mood and atmosphere are produced by what takes place in the poem.
IMAGERY

An image in poetry is any significant piece of data. Image covers sound heard, texture felt, odours smelled and object tasted sense perception is a major source of poetic creation. Image is one of the most significant elements in construction a poem. Images are also the foundations of similes, metaphors, puns, hyperbole, and other types of figurative language. Image refers to an object seen or perceived by other senses regardless whether it is used literally or as a part of a figure of speech. Images then are concentrate nouns, objects which are specific and have shape and weight.

Poets use visual image the most images of touch, smell and taste are often use in conjunction with each other and with visual details.

Figurative language usually takes the turn of simile or metaphor.

SYMBOLISM

All content words are symbols. Words are not the things they represent but the symbols for those things. A symbol is something that means more than what it actually is.

Symbolism is the use of an object to stand for itself and to represent something else, usually something with a larger meaning and importance. A symbol can be a thing, a word, an animal, or any object. The most common symbol is a rose that stands for beauty or love. Colours too can be used as symbols: green is the colour of life, freshness and naturalness, blue stands of tranquillity and serenity, and black symbolises evil, darkness and also mystery.

The rose is used in several ways in the following poems; Blake’s “The Sick Rose”, Burn’s “A Red, Red Rose” and Robert Frost’s “The Rose Family”. How does this same object use to symbolize different things?

Study the following questions.

1. Identify the different poetic devices poet use to make their poems unique and interesting.

2. Please refer to the first poem assigned for this course. How many devices can you identify in After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling Comes
UNIT 3  SELECTED POEMS AND CRITICAL STUDY

Performance Objective

Students would be able to:
1. Identify poetic devices use in poems
2. Explain the different poetic devices use in poems.
3. Discuss the connotative and denotative meaning of poems.
4. Discuss the theme of the poems.

There are all together 32 poems assigned for this semester. The poems are written by poets from various backgrounds and from both gender. The following is the list of poems assigned for this semester

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Reading Poetry

When you read poems your tasks are to understand the language, ideas, attitude, and frames of reference that will make the poems come alive.

The most common themes in poetry are love and loss, nature, war, religion/faith, implicitly poetry also deals with the questions of time, identity and coming to terms with something (pain, death, or events)

Each poem has to be read more than once.

In the process of reading poem keep these objectives in mind:

1. Read straight through to get a general sense of the poem. In this first reading, do not stop to puzzle out hard passages or obscure words; just read through from the beginning to end.

2. Try to understand the poem’s meaning and organization. As you read and reread study these elements.

   • The title

   • The speaker – First – person speakers talk from the “inside” because they are directly involved with the action. Other speakers are “outside” observers demonstrating the third person limited and omniscient points of view as in “Sir Patrick Spens”

   • The meanings of all words, whether familiar or unfamiliar

   • The poems setting and situation.

   • The poem’s basic form and development

   • The poem’s subject and theme – subject indicates the general or specific topic – theme refers to the idea or ideas that the poem explores.
The following questions can help you in discovering ideas on the assigned poem.

- What does the title contribute to the reader’s understanding?
- Who is speaking? Where is the speaker when the poem is happening?
- What is the situation? What has happened in the past, or what is happening in the present, that has brought about the speech?
- What difficult, special or unusual words does the poem contain? What references need explaining? How does an explanation assist in the understanding of the poem?
- How does the poem develop? Is it personal statement? Is it a story?
- What is the main idea of the poem? What details make possible the formulation of the main idea?

(Taken from Roberts and Jacobs 1998)
... it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way.

### About the poet

**Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886)**

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is acknowledged as one of America’s greatest poets. She was born on December 10, 1830. Dickinson wrote most of her poetry during the decade of 1860’s. She was considered a reclusive person.

Many of Dickinson’s poems are quite short. Her poems consist of not more than a single line but some are much longer. Dickinson poems are energetic, imaginative, creative and also economical. Her style is described as elliptical and obscure, producing a rapid interplay of thoughts and images. Her diction is neutral but she frequently introduces formal words.

Dickinson’s sentences are regularly broken by interjections and sentence fragments. These grammatical irregularities are used deliberately and words are emphasized throughout the use of capital letters. Dickinson’s poems are mostly private monologues, therefore periods and commas are usually ignored. Instead, she uses dash and exclamation point to signify rhythm and vocal modulations.

The subjects of her poems are found in her surroundings; house, garden, yard, and village. Sometimes a recollection, a single word, a concept or a paradox becomes the starting point of her poems (a memory) a haunted mind, the condition of solitude, the state of self-reliance, the angle of winter light, the condition of dying.
EMILY DICKINSON  (1830 – 1886)

After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes  (Taken from Kennedy and Gioia;1120-1)

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 –

Anything, nothing

About the poem

In “After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes” Dickenson wrote on the subject of love and the psychology of personal relationships. ‘After Great Pain’ expresses a severe suffering experienced by the persona. This experience is affecting the mental and emotion rather than the physical body. The nerve is the first part of the body that feels the pain. The nerves become stiff and empty and cold. Human being when experience pain goes through the motions of life without feeling at all. Nothing seems to matter anymore. ‘The Feet, mechanical, go around one walks around not aware of what she or he is doing.

In the final stanza the poet uses hard and cold images. Time is likened to metal and if the person can outlive this tragic experience the person will remember the stages his body and mind went through. With the acceptance come the relief and the letting go.

Study the following questions.

1. Discuss the use of imagery in this poem?

2. Discuss the theme of the poem?

3. Why does Dickenson use capital letters in her poem?
EMILY DICKINSON  (1830 – 1886)

Success Is Counted Sweetest
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1118)

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne’er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated — dying —
On those forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

About the poem

This poem describes how one feels when he finally achieved what he so much desires. Success does not come overnight. One needs to be patient and not to give up when confronted with failures after failures. The success will be more appreciated if it comes to you after so much hard work. Victory is like success. A dying man understands victory more clearly than the victorious army does. There is no one straight road that leads to victory. Every failures and disappointments in life should be treated as further motivation to work harder towards one’s goal in life.

Study the following questions

1. Discuss the form of this poem?
2. What is the theme of this poem?
3. Name one poetic device that the poet uses and how does this device help to develop the main idea of the poem.
EMILY DICKINSON  (1830 – 1886)

Because I Could Not Stop for Death  
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1122)

Because I could not stop Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and chill –
For only Gossamer,* my Gown –
My Tippet* – only Tulle* –

We passed before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ’tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity –

About the Poem

The first stanza suggests that the female speaker is so deeply engaged in her own life that she does not wish to stop. Death is likened to a courtship. Courting is male prerogative; she must wait to be called upon. She must give up her work and her leisure “For His Civility”. He has all the privileges of authority. The death coach contains the new couple. “And Immortality” suggests something of the enormous duration of the marriage
journey. However, it also suggests that male authority extends into eternity; both earthly life and after life are in his hands.

The second stanza highlights the slowness and solemnity of this journey to a bridal house that strongly resembles a grave. She is assumed to have no interest or activity separate from his. As the journey progress the speaker becomes increasingly aware that she has lost all agency and volition. The fields of grain are ‘gazing’ at her; the setting sun ‘passed Us’. In her bridal finery she experiences a mortal chill: ‘For only Gossamer, my Gown - /My Tippet – only Tulle – ’. The wedding house turns out to be grave; it is lowly and scarcely undifferentiated from the ground. Since this deathly bridal day, it seems like ‘Centuries’ and ‘Eternity’. Dickinson’s poem suggests the eternity of death-in-life endured after marriage.

In this poem woman is interrupted from her independent activities and brought to a house that seems ‘A Swelling of the Ground’, inevitably suggesting the house of biological destiny, the womb as tomb. There is the suggestion in the poem that female autonomy would threaten the existing order; a woman with her own work and her own leisure may be too busy ‘to stop’ for death.

In this poem, death marks the dissolution of the social order and becomes an emblem of liberation from its oppressive and artificial conventions.

Study the following questions:

1. Who is the speaker, and what is she like? Why couldn’t she stop for death? What perspective does she present position give the poem?

2. In what unusual ways does the poem characterize death?

3. What does the carriage represent? Where is it headed? Who are the riders? What is meant by the things the carriage passes?

4. What is represented by the house in line 17? Why does the poet use the word “house” in preference to some other word?

5. Is this poem generally symbolic or is it allegorical? Explain the significance of the details in lines 9-13 and lines 17-20.
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.
About the poem

In this poem, the poet does not mention the name of the animal. Instead, she uses certain words that create vivid images. Each of the stanzas is the description of the animal. The poem reveals an impression of an animal the poet has occasionally seen moving in the grass.

Study the following questions

1. Name the animal being described in the poem and why doesn’t the poet mention it?
2. What image is evoked by the word comb in the grass divides us with a comb (line 5)?
3. The poet achieves a vivid description of the animal’s movement in stanza 4. There are two words which suggest the quickness, quiet stealthiness and peculiarity of its movement. What are the two effective words?
Writing on Poetry

Students can choose to write on Emily Dickinson's poetry based on the following topics:

1. Dickinson's characteristic brevity in the explanation of situations and the expression of ideas.
2. Dickinson's use of personal but not totally disclosed subject matter.
3. Dickinson's use of imagery and symbolism sources, types, meanings.
4. Dickinson's ideas about love, separation, personal pain, war, death, faith, religion, science, the soul.
5. Dickinson's humour and irony.
6. Dickinson's poems as they appear on the page.
About the poet

Robert Frost (1874 – 1963)

Robert Frost is one of America’s most well-known poets. He was born in San Francisco in 1874. He is famous for writing poetry on the subject of rural and natural scenes of New England.

Frost lived in New Hampshire, New England. It is here in the middle of farm and rural surroundings, he began to write poetry. His books of poems were only published when he and his family moved to England.

Frost and his family moved back to America in 1915 because of the first world war. By this time he is recognised as a major American poet of the twentieth century. He died in January 1963 when he was 89 years old.
ROBERT FROST (1874–1963)

Mending Wall
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1195–1196)

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill,
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
‘Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What was it, going in or out, as I passed.
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.’ I could say ‘Elves’ to him,
But it’s not elves exactly, and I’d rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father’s saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’

About the poem

Mending Wall is about the building of wall between two men and their houses. The two neighbours in this poem seems to building the wall to mark territory but when we look deeper it seems to be more about marking territories to stop misunderstandings or arguments. Every springtime they repeat this task. One neighbour does it because of tradition the other does not seem to understand why there should be wall between the two properties.

‘Good fences make good neighbours’ suggests that isolation makes a good relationship. The idea is confusing to the speaker but his neighbour insists that to maintain a good relationship there should be a barrier because to him ‘familiarity breeds contempt’. The phrase ‘Good fences make good neighbours’ is repeated in the final line to emphasize the neighbour’s stubbornness and close mindedness. The neighbour is so bound by tradition that he is unable to look at the other person’s point of view. The speaker on the other hand is of the opinion that building relationships with our neighbours is important because we cannot live in harmony if we live in isolation.

Study the following questions.

1. Why does Frost use full stop in the middle of the lines?
2. Discuss the use of metaphors in this poem?
3. What is the theme of this poem?
ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

**Fire and Ice**
(Kennedy and Gioia 2002:826)

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

---

**About the poem**

In this poem, Frost contrasts two destructive forces: fire and ice. The two forces are equally great and destructive. There are two options by which this world comes to an end. Fire or anger consumes and destroys quickly leaving only ashes behind. On the other hand, ice or hate destroys slowly. Extreme feelings or forces are destructive. Therefore, moderation in what ever you do will make this world a better place for its inhabitants.

**Study the following questions:**

1. To whom does Frost refer in line 1? In line 2?

2. What connotations of fire and ice contribute to the richness of Frost’s comparison?
ROBERT FROST

(1874-1963)

Nothing Gold Can Stay
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1016)

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
'Nothing gold can stay.'

About the poem

The title of the poem reflects the picture of something precious in our life will not last forever. The cycle of nature is likened to the cycle of human's life.

'Nothing Gold can Stay' describes the moment of early spring when the trees beginning to show its first sign of life after the winter season. The new leaves emerge first as yellow or golden blossom before they become green leaves. This period of blossom is very brief.'But only so an hour.'(Line 4)

The next line indicates that the hour of glory is beginning to fade. The season of spring begins to move on to another season. Gold is a symbol of high value and great beauty. But like nature itself – day gives way to night, Spring is followed by Summer, Fall and Winter, green leaves turn brown – there is no permanence in life. Youth is followed by maturity, old age and finally death. The golden moment in our life is temporary, therefore seize that single moment and make the best out of it.

Study the following questions:

1. To what myth does this poem allude? Does Frost sound as though he believes in the myth of as though he rejects it?

2. When Frost says, "Nature's first green is gold," he is describing how many leaves first appear as tiny yellow buds and blossoms. But what else does this line imply?

3. What would happen to the poem's meaning if line 6 were omitted?
ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1196)

Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

About the poem

The basic image of this poem is a snowy scene viewed by the speaker as he moves past at night. He is on his way home and is taking a shorter route. The scene that welcomes him is too mesmerising. He stops to watch the woods fill up with snow. It is dark and all around him is silence. The only sound is the sound of the wind and the sound of the horse’s bell. Even though the speaker wants to stay longer to sink into the beauty of nature, he has to continue his journey home because he has promises to keep and he still has to go a lot further to reach home.

Man’s life is never without responsibilities. Some enjoy his responsibilities while others at some stages in their life feel the responsibilities a burden. Often men would stop and take time to make important decision to either ignore the responsibilities or fulfil them. The persona in this poem for a moment feels a moment of indecision, ‘The woods are lovely, dark and deep.’ But he cannot ignores his responsibilities ‘But I have promises to keep’. He has to convince himself to fulfil his promise and hence the repetition of the last two lines, ‘And miles to go before I sleep’.

47
Study the following questions:

1. What do we learn about the speaker? Where is he? What is he doing?

2. What evidence suggests that the speaker is embarrassed or self-conscious about stopping? Consider the words “though” in line 2 and “must” in line 5.

3. The last stanza offers two alternative attitudes and courses of action. What are they? Which does the speaker choose?

4. To what extent do the sound and rhyme of this poem contribute to its impact? Note especially the sound s sounds in line 11 and the w sounds in line 12.
ROBERT FROST  (1874 – 1963)

Desert Places

(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:917-918)

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it – it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less –
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

About the poem

Desert Places tells us about loneliness and emptiness that a person may experience in this life. On the first reading a reader is confronted with description of nature but as the poem progresses one sees the comparison Frost makes between nature and human experience. Every human being experience loneliness. It is up to the individual how he deals with this experience.
Study the following questions:

1. What setting and situation are established in lines 1-4? What does the snow affect here? What does it affect in lines 5-8? In lines 9-12?

2. What different kinds of “desert places” in this poem about? Which kind is the most important? Most frightening?

3. How does the type of rhyme (rising or falling) change in the last stanza? How does this change affect the tone and impact of the poem?

4. How does the stanzaic pattern of this poem organize the progression of the speaker’s thoughts, feelings, and conclusions?
ROBERT BROWNING  (1812 – 1889)

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:1175-1177)

1
Gr-r-r – there go, my heart’s abhorrence!
   Water your damned flowerpots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
   God’s blood, would not mine kill you!
What? Your myrtle bush wants trimming?
   Oh, that rose has prior claims –
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
   Hell dry you up with its flames!

2
At the meal we sit together:
   Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
   Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork crop: scarcely
   Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What’s the Latin name for “parley”?
   What’s the Greek name for Swine’s Snout?

3
Whew! We’ll have our platter burnished,
   Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we’re furnished,
   And a goblet for ourself;
Rinsed like something sacrificial
   ‘Ere ‘tis fit to touch our chaps:
Marked with L. for our initial!
   (Ho-he! There his lily snaps!)
4
Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchica, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
- Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?"
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

Pirate's

5
When he finishes refecion,*
Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jeux's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange-pulp —
In three sips the Arian* frustrate;
While he drains his at one gulp.

dinner

6
Oh, those melons? If he's able
We're to have a feast! so nice!
One goes to Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double?
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange! — And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

Anti-Trinitarian (a heretic)

7
There's a great text in Galatians,*
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?*

Perhaps 3:10 or 5:19-21
heretic
Or, my scrofulous* French novel
On gray paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial’s* gripe:
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in’t

Or, there’s Satan! — one might venture
Fleege one’s soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture?
As he’d miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We’re so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine…
‘St, there’s Vespers! Plena gratià?
Ave, Virgo!* Gr-er — you swine!

* Pornographic
* the Devil
* Contract
* Full of grace
* Hail, Virgin!
ROBERT BROWNING  (1812 – 1889)

My Last Duchess
(Taken from Kennedy and Gioia 2002:751-753)

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.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
“Frà Pandolf” by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured contenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
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
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
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.
Sir, ‘twas all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
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
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
Quite clear to such a one, and say, “Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark” — and if she let
Herself be lessoned 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
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
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Or 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,
Taming a sea horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck’ cast in bronze for me!

3 Friar Pandolf
34 Neptune
36 Claus of Innsbruck

An imaginary painter who is also a monk
Roman god of the sea
An imaginary sculptor

About the poem

The poem opens with Alfonso II, the Duke of Ferrara, Italy entertaining an emissary from an unnamed count. The purpose of their business is to arrange a marriage between the duke and the count’s daughter. The events actually begin with the duke’s painting put a full length portrait of his ‘last duchess’. He tells the story behind the painting: the artist portrayed a ‘certain look’ in the duchess’ face. “The depth and passion of its earnest glance” displeased the duke because he thought that that particular look should have been reserved for him alone. The duchess however, bestowed it upon any “officious fool” who happened to be courteous. The duke “gave commands” (either to have the duchess killed or sent to a convent) and all smiles stopped.”
The duke's story ends. The two start to leave the room, and the duke remarks on the dowry of the count's daughter, protesting however, that it is of minor importance. He comments on another work of art, a bronze, "Neptune...taming a sea-horse."

The situation is dramatic. The emissary has come to arrange a marriage. This information is given to the reader only at the end of the poem.

The character of the duke is revealed by examining the poem. He is proud; he refers continually to 'my duchess,' 'my favour at her breast,' 'my gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name.' He is proud of his possessions and indicates that his interest in the portrait is not because it is of his wife but that it is a masterpiece of Fra Pandolf's. He is proud in the same material way of a bronze by Claus of Innsbruck. And this pride, or vanity, lies behind the fate of the duchess. Whether he had the duchess killed or simply sent her away and let her die of humiliation and disgrace makes little difference. The smiles stopped, and he makes no apology or further explanation. His jealousy was caused by his failure to possess completely every phase of his wife's life.

Study the following questions:

1. Who dominates the conversation in this poem? Who is the listener? Why does the main speaker avoid the obvious purpose of the conversation until near the poem's end?

2. What third character does the speaker describe? In what ways are his descriptions accurate or inaccurate? What judgment do you think Browning wants you to make of the speaker? Why?

3. How does the poem illustrate the speaker's misuse of power?
LANGSTON HUGHES  (1902 – 1967)

Negro
(Taken from Kirsner and Mandell 2001:727)
I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I’ve been a slave:
Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I’ve been a worker:
Under my hand the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I’ve been a singer:
All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I’ve been a victim:
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

About the poem

The speaker/persona in this poem ‘a negro’ describes the roles African-Americans have played in the history of Western society. They were slaves, workers, singers and victims. Hughes use this technique to reveal to the readers the voice of his ancestors who were forced to serve others. These ancestors were denied their identities. By presenting the sufferings and accomplishments the speaker asserts his pride in being black.

Study the following questions

1. Describe the persona in this poem.
2. What is the implied warning the persona gives out to those who contribute towards the suffering of the black people.
Wahbegan

Didja ever hear a sound
smell something
taste something
that brought you back
to Vietnam, instantly?
Didja ever wonder
when it would end?
It ended for my brother.
He died in the war
but didn’t fall down
for fifteen tortured years.
His flashbacks are over,
another casualty whose name
will never be on the Wall.
Some can find peace
only in death.
The sound of his family crying hurt.
The smell of the flowers
didn’t comfort us.
The bitter taste
in my mouth
still sours me.
How about a memorial
for those made it
through the war
but still died
before their time?

WAHBEGAN. The title is an Ojibway name