

English in Use

Text : Alexa Morton

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Rhyme and reason

The fundamentals of poetry analysis are surprisingly straightforward. Apply these methods to unpick that tangled knot of words in your English assignment

YOU have read it. And read it again. Possibly even read it a third and equally uncomprehending time if you are feeling really desperate. It is still, essentially, a seemingly random collection of words on a page. And you have got to 'analyse' it.

Great. Actually, that is right – it really is great! Because the freedom of a seemingly random collection of words on a page means that you get to come up with your very own, unique interpretation. Here are some tips to help you get your 'poetry hat' on.

Form

THIS basically means what type of poem is it, but more importantly, why is the poet using a particular form? Ask yourself the following questions.

Does it follow a traditional format (eg, is it a sonnet? Then, why is it a sonnet? A sonnet usually expresses the poet's love for someone or something.)

How many verses are there? Could there be a secret message here? (eg, a poem about time could have three verses, or a 'tripartite structure', perhaps representing past, present and future?)

Imagery and diction

CONNOTATIONS of the lexis – these are two fancy words which are very simple but make you sound super intelligent. 'Lexis' just means vocabulary, words. Connotations are the associations we make when we see a word. For example, the colour red connotes love, passion and roses but also blood, death and anger. The connotations of particular lexis can give you a clue as to the message of the poem.

Metaphor, simile – never underestimate these! In the case of simile, why is something being compared to something else? What effect does the comparison have? If it is a metaphor, the image is so strong it *becomes* something else. Instead of "the sun shone like a diamond in the sky", a metaphor would be "a diamond in the sky, the sun shone". The metaphor tells us the sun has actually become a diamond. Wow.

Putting it all together

NOW you have got some cool content and incredible ideas (that is a subtle touch of alliteration for punchy, engaging effect), you have to get those ideas down on paper. Introducing the saviour of many a poetry panic, the hero of English essays the world over, the one, the only ...

PEEZL

To the uninitiated this may seem a bit anti-climactic, but the key to PEEZL and the elements which have made it a champion among English tips and

techniques are the Z and the L. If you follow PEEZL you cannot possibly fail to answer the question, develop your ideas or analyse language in detail, all of which, I am sure you have noted, hit the top bands of any mark scheme. Here is why:

Point (answer the question)

Evidence (quotation)

Explain (how does the quotation back up your point?)

ZOOM! (Pick out individual words/punctuation, etc, and zoom in on them)

Link (to the question, context and the possible message the poet is trying to convey)

Here is a working example:

How does Shakespeare express his love in Sonnet 18?

Point: *Shakespeare controversially rejects traditional expressions of love to show how genuine his love is for his mistress.*

Evidence: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

Explain: *Here, Shakespeare is questioning this simile and its relevance to the object of his affections.*

ZOOM!: *The end-stopped line takes the form of a rhetorical question, revealing that Shakespeare feels this is not an accurate way of expressing his love.*

Link: *Shakespeare is deliberately questioning Petrarchan conventions which idealise women by comparing them to goddesses and summer. The poet is clearly of the opinion that these traditional images are not an adequate means of expressing his love.*

As you can see, structuring your paragraphs using PEEZL is a surefire way to produce detailed and sensitive analysis. Boom. And there it is: go forth and analyse poetry with confidence and flair!