

INCONTRO CON... UN GENERE (2)

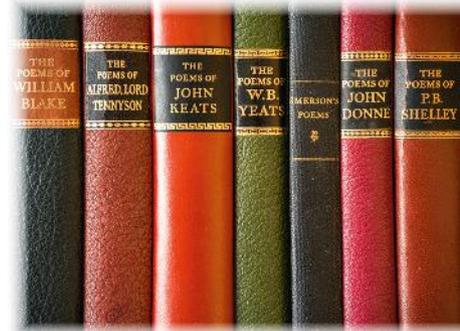
Poetry

Introduction

This worksheet will help you understand poetry as a literary genre and prepare effectively for your final literature exam. The questions are organised by task type to help you recognise what each question is asking you to do and how to structure a strong answer.

The sample answers focus on *The Sick Rose* by William Blake, but at key points, you are asked to apply the same strategies to other poems you've studied. The goal is to help you transfer skills, not memorise answers.

By the end of this work, you should feel confident about how to approach any poem in your final exam: understanding the question, selecting evidence, and developing thoughtful, personal responses.



A FIRST LOOK Before answering read the poem carefully



O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.



William Blake, *The Sick Rose* (1794)

Part A • Answering Questions

1. 'Report' questions

Question: What is the poem *The Sick Rose* about?

Sample answer: *The Sick Rose* by William Blake is a short poem describing a rose that has become "sick" after an "invisible worm" has found its "bed of crimson joy" during a storm at night. The worm's "dark secret love" destroys the rose's life. The poem uses direct address, with the speaker warning the rose about its corruption and destruction.

YOUR TURN!

Describe the content of another poem you've studied (e.g., a Romantic or Modernist poem from your syllabus).

TIPS!

Include: who speaks, what happens, main images.

2. 'Describe' questions

Question: Describe the imagery used in *The Sick Rose*.

Sample answer: Blake uses vivid sensory imagery throughout the poem.

- The **central visual image** is the rose itself, described as "sick" and associated with the colour "crimson" suggesting both beauty and blood.
- The **worm** is described as "invisible," creating a sense of hidden threat.

- The **temporal imagery** places events “in the night” during a “howling storm” creating a dark, violent atmosphere.
- The **spatial imagery** of the worm finding the rose’s “bed” has both natural (where the rose grows) and intimate connotations.
- The **phrase** “crimson joy” combines colour with emotion, while “dark secret love” combines visual darkness with concealed passion.

These images work together to create an atmosphere of corruption, secrecy, and destruction.

YOUR TURN!

Describe the use of sound devices (alliteration, assonance, rhythm) in *The Sick Rose* or another poem you’ve studied.

TIPS!

Identify specific examples and explain their effect on meaning and mood.

3. ‘Explain’ questions

Question: Explain why Blake might have chosen such simple language for a poem with complex symbolic meaning.

Sample answer: Blake deliberately uses simple, accessible language in *The Sick Rose* for several reasons. First, this reflects his belief that poetry should be available to all readers, not just the educated elite. The vocabulary with words like “sick”, “worm”, “bed”, “joy”, “love” are familiar and concrete, making the poem immediately comprehensible at a literal level. However, this simplicity is deceptive. The accessible language allows Blake to embed multiple layers of symbolic meaning that readers can explore gradually. A child might understand the poem as being about a flower destroyed by an insect, while adult readers recognise allegorical meanings about innocence corrupted by experience, hidden desires, or social hypocrisy. The contrast between simple form and complex meaning forces the reader to look beneath surface meanings. This technique is characteristic of Blake’s work in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, where simple language carries profound philosophical and spiritual significance.

YOUR TURN!

Choose a different poem. Explain why the poet might have chosen a particular image or symbol as the central focus of the poem.

TIPS!

Consider: what the central image/symbol represents, what alternatives the poet could have chosen and why this choice is more effective, how the image connects to the poem’s themes.

4. ‘Explore’ questions

Question: Explore the different symbolic interpretations possible for the rose and the worm.

Sample answer: The rose and worm function as multivalent symbols open to various interpretations, which is part of the poem’s richness.

The rose might symbolise: (1) innocence or purity being corrupted; (2) feminine sexuality or a woman herself; (3) beauty and perfection in nature or art; (4) love or romantic feeling; (5) the human soul.

The “crimson” colour suggests both vitality and violence, passion and blood.

The worm might represent: (1) disease or decay; (2) masculine sexuality, particularly predatory or destructive desire (the phallic imagery is undeniable); (3) hidden guilt or sin; (4) jealousy or possessive love; (5) hypocrisy or social corruption that operates in secrecy; (6) mortality itself.

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The interaction between them could represent: sexual corruption of innocence, the destructive nature of concealed passion, how secrecy and repression lead to psychological damage, or how beauty and purity inevitably face destruction in a fallen world.

What makes Blake's symbolism powerful is that these interpretations aren't mutually exclusive as the poem works on multiple levels simultaneously. The "invisibility" of the worm and the "secret" nature of its love suggest that Blake is particularly interested in hidden, repressed forces and their destructive consequences. This multiplicity of meaning is characteristic of symbolic poetry and Blake's visionary approach.

YOUR TURN!

Explore what might change in our understanding of the poem if we read it from a different perspective (for example: historical, psychological, feminist, political, or biographical). First, apply the question to Blake's *The Sick Rose*, then to another poem that you've studied.

TIPS!

Consider: what new meanings emerge from this perspective? What aspects of the poem become more significant? What might we overlook with only one interpretation? How do multiple readings enrich rather than contradict each other?

5. 'Evaluate' questions

Question: Evaluate whether *The Sick Rose* is more effective as a simple lyric poem or as a complex allegory.

Sample answer: This question addresses the fundamental tension in Blake's poetry between surface simplicity and symbolic depth.

Arguments for effectiveness as a simple lyric:

The poem works beautifully at a literal level as a dramatic lyric about natural corruption. The imagery is vivid and affecting without requiring interpretation. The emotional impact (beauty being destroyed) comes through immediately. The musical qualities (rhythm, rhyme, sound patterns) create aesthetic pleasure independent of symbolic meaning. For readers who prefer poetry as sensory and emotional experience rather than intellectual puzzle, this directness is the poem's strength.

Arguments for effectiveness as complex allegory:

The poem's real power emerges through symbolic interpretation. The literal reading is very clear: a flower destroyed by an insect. The allegorical meanings (about sexuality, repression, corruption of innocence, destructive secrecy) give the poem philosophical and psychological depth. Blake's placement in *Songs of Experience* signals symbolic intent.

Evaluation:

The poem's true achievement is that it works simultaneously on both levels, and each enhances the other.

YOUR TURN!

Evaluate whether the poem's brevity (only eight lines) is a strength or limitation.

TIPS!

Consider: concentration of meaning, memorability, what's left unsaid, whether more lines would add or detract.

Part B • Expressing Your Opinions

Question: Do you find *The Sick Rose* disturbing or beautiful?

Model answer structure:

CLAIM: I find *The Sick Rose* both disturbing and beautiful, and this combination is essential to its power as poetry.

ARGUMENT: The poem is undeniably beautiful in its technical features: the musical rhythm, the vivid colour imagery of the “crimson” rose, the lyrical quality of phrases like “bed of crimson joy”. Blake’s language has an almost song-like quality that creates aesthetic pleasure. However, this beauty makes the disturbing content even more unsettling. The poem describes destruction, corruption, and a kind of violation (the sexual undertones are impossible to ignore). The “invisible worm” that “flies in the night” in a “howling storm” creates gothic horror. The phrase “dark secret love” suggests something mysterious and concealed. What makes the poem particularly disturbing is the combination of the intimate (“bed,” “love”) with the destructive (“destroy”). The beauty of the form and the darkness of the content create a productive tension. If the poem were only beautiful, it would be merely decorative; if only disturbing, it would be gratuitously dark. The combination forces us to confront how beauty and corruption coexist, which is part of Blake’s vision of Experience.

PRACTICE

Practise formulating your own opinions:

1. Is symbolic poetry more valuable than poetry with clear, direct meaning?
CLAIM: _____ **ARGUMENT:** _____
2. Do sound devices (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration) enhance meaning or are they merely decorative?
CLAIM: _____ **ARGUMENT:** _____
3. Should poems be read primarily for emotional impact or intellectual understanding?
CLAIM: _____ **ARGUMENT:** _____

Part C • Making Connections

C1. How to structure answers connecting to other literature

When asked to compare poems, use this structure:

- **STEP 1** – IDENTIFY a clear point of comparison (theme, technique, form, imagery)
- **STEP 2** – SHOW what both poems share
- **STEP 3** – SHOW how they differ
- **STEP 4** – EXPLAIN what this comparison reveals

Example: Compare the use of nature imagery in Blake’s *The Sick Rose* and a Romantic nature poem (e.g., Wordsworth).

Both Blake’s *The Sick Rose* and Wordsworth’s nature poetry use natural imagery centrally, but they approach nature with opposite perspectives. Wordsworth typically presents nature as a source of spiritual renewal and comfort. In poems like *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, natural images (daffodils, lake) create joy and provide memories that sustain the speaker in difficult times.

Blake’s *The Sick Rose*, however, presents nature as a site of corruption and destruction. The rose, traditionally a symbol of beauty and love, becomes “sick.” The natural process (a worm consuming a flower) is portrayed as destructive rather than as part of a natural cycle. Where Wordsworth finds harmony in nature, Blake finds violence and corruption.

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This comparison reveals that Romantic poets, despite sharing the period and some concerns, had fundamentally different philosophies. Wordsworth's optimistic view of nature reflects his faith in natural goodness and divine presence in the natural world. Blake's darker vision in *The Sick Rose* reflects his concern with the "fallen" state of the world and his belief that innocence is inevitably corrupted by experience.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Compare the treatment of a similar theme in two different poems you've studied (e.g., love, death, time, nature, social criticism).

- Point of comparison
- How they differ
- What both poems show
- What this reveals

C2. How to structure answers connecting to contemporary issues

When asked "Is this poem still relevant today?" use this structure:

- **STEP 1** - IDENTIFY the theme/issue in the poem
- **STEP 2** - NAME the contemporary parallel
- **STEP 3** - EXPLAIN the specific connection
- **STEP 4** - EXPLAIN why this matters (the "so what?")

Example: Connecting *The Sick Rose* to contemporary issues.

In *The Sick Rose*, Blake explores how secrecy and hidden desires can become destructive, particularly when society forces natural feelings underground through repression and shame. This remains highly relevant today, particularly in relation to issues of sexual shame, mental health stigma, and the psychological damage caused by forced concealment.

Just as the worm's love is "dark" and "secret," operating invisibly at night, many people today still feel compelled to hide aspects of their identity, desires, or struggles because of social stigma or fear of judgment. The poem suggests that it's this secrecy itself, not the feeling or desire, that becomes "destructive." This connects to contemporary understanding of how shame and concealment around sexuality, mental health, or personal struggles can cause psychological harm, while openness and acceptance promote wellbeing.

This connection matters because it reveals that Blake was diagnosing a problem—the destructive effects of repression and enforced secrecy—that persists in modern society. The poem reminds us that openness, acceptance, and "bringing things into the light" are not just modern progressive values but psychologically necessary for personal well-being.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Choose a theme from a poem you've studied and connect it to today.

- Theme/issue in the poem
- Contemporary parallel
- Specific connection (with example)
- Why this matters

C3. How to structure answers connecting to Citizenship Education & SDGs

When asked to connect poetry to citizenship values or global goals, use this structure:

- **STEP 1** - IDENTIFY which SDG or citizenship value is relevant
- **STEP 2** - SHOW how it appears in the poem (with specific example)
- **STEP 3** - EXPLAIN the connection to civic/democratic values
- **STEP 4** - STATE why this matters for citizenship today

Example: Connecting *The Sick Rose* to:

- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

The Sick Rose connects to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), particularly concerning sexual and reproductive health, bodily autonomy, and the psychological effects of shame and repression.

In the poem, the rose's destruction comes through "dark secret love". If we read the rose as representing feminine sexuality (a common interpretation), the poem illustrates how secrecy, shame, and lack of autonomy around sexuality and the body can be psychologically and physically destructive. The "invisible" worm suggests forces that operate through concealment and lack of acknowledgment.

Democratic societies increasingly recognise that sexual and reproductive health, freedom from shame, and informed choice about one's body are fundamental rights. Gender equality requires that women (and all people) have autonomy over their bodies without shame or secrecy.

Blake's poem, written in 1794, reminds us that repression and enforced secrecy around natural human experiences cause harm. As citizens, we should advocate for education, healthcare, and social attitudes that promote openness, informed choice, and psychological wellbeing rather than shame and concealment.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Choose a poem and connect it to an SDG or citizenship value.

- SDG/citizenship value
- How it appears in the poem (specific example)
- Connection to civic values
- Why this matters for citizens today

FINAL EXAM PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Before your exam, make sure you can:

- DESCRIBE a poem's structure, form, and rhyme scheme clearly
- IDENTIFY and explain imagery, symbolism, and figurative language
- DISCUSS sound devices and their contribution to meaning
- PRESENT multiple interpretations with textual evidence
- EXPRESS personal responses with clear arguments
- CONNECT poems to other literature meaningfully
- RELATE poetry to contemporary issues and citizenship themes
- SPEAK confidently about your analysis for 3-5 minutes
- SUPPORT all claims with specific references to the text