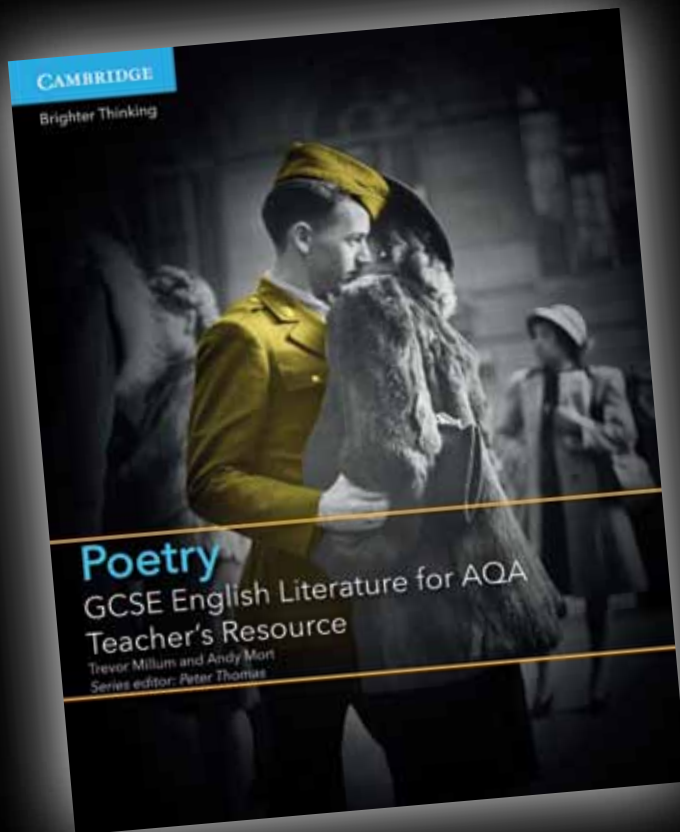


HINTS AND TIPS FOR TEACHING POETRY PART 2



Written by **Trevor Millum**,
on behalf of Cambridge
University Press

About the author:

Trevor Millum is well known for his work on creativity, poetry and the use of ICT. He has published many teaching resources, and is the creator of and poet in residence at Teachit's Poetry Place, where he has written over 150 Teaching resources.



POETRY - TERMS AND TECHNIQUES

WHAT DO YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW?

Most of the terms used to talk about poetry are also used in discussing or describing prose. Make sure students know this and can look out for examples in fiction and non-fiction so that they realise that metaphor and personification, for example, are not things which are peculiar to poetry.

There are relatively few terms that apply largely to poems rather than prose. **Rhyme** and **rhythm** are two obvious ones - and ones which students should know by now!

Regarding rhyme, they should be able to spot **half rhymes** (which are best explained as 'near rhymes' or 'inexact rhymes') where the sound is very similar but not exact. For example, 'fair' and 'more' or 'rain' and 'paid'. This type of rhyme is often used where the poet wants to avoid the rhyme being too obtrusive. They should also be able to spot **internal rhymes**, such as 'They could not wait, so took their skates / and to the glassy duck-pond raced.' ('Raced' and 'skates' could also be seen as near- or half-rhymes.)

There is little to be gained by telling the examiner that a poem rhymes ABCB and so on. It's sufficient to notice that a poem has a regular rhyme - and, importantly, if that rhyme is disrupted somewhere (and why that might be). They should, though, know a sonnet when they see one.

Students should also be able to tell the difference between **rhymed verse** with a regular rhyme (and usually a regular rhythm), **blank verse** and **free verse**. Blank verse has a regular rhythm but no rhyme (see Tennyson's *Ulysses*) and free verse has little or no rhyme and no discernible regularity of rhythm.

Rhythm is always the more difficult partner with its iambs and trochees. But, to be honest, the key thing is to be able to hear the rhythm or sound pattern of a poem and discuss it if it has relevance, rather than being able to name it with a classical term. Again, if a poem has a regular rhythm, that is mildly interesting. If it has a rhythm which changes or is broken at some point, that is very interesting and needs investigating.

Enjambment is a favourite with students and merely means that a line of a poem has not been stopped ('end-stopped') with a comma or other punctuation but runs naturally on to the next line. I prefer to talk about **run-on lines**. Once more, noticing enjambment is not in itself helpful. Only mention it if it seems to be a particular feature of a poem or part of a poem, as it is in Browning's dramatic monologues, for example, where it gives the impression of natural speech and a continuing narrative.

Something often missed is the **shape** of a poem. What does it look like on the page? This may tell you something about the text. Long lines mixed with very short lines may indicate a tension within the poem. Some poems look very regular, others look relaxed - is this reflected in the meaning?

TERMS USED IN TALKING ABOUT ALL KINDS OF WRITING

So what of **metaphor** and **simile**? By Y10, students should know what they are. They should also learn that the difference between them is insignificant. The important thing is the use of **imagery** or **figurative** language. Simile spotting is not as useful as noticing that a writer has used imagery for a certain purpose or of a certain type. 'In *Storm on the Island*, Heaney repeatedly uses the imagery of warfare.' (Who cares if some are similes and some are metaphors?)



Assonance and **alliteration** are another two favourites: the repetition of vowel sounds and of consonant sounds. Students will get no marks for pointing out that poet X uses alliteration in line 5. Why, to what purpose? ('The repeated 'm' sound in '...for summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells' not only reflects the sound of the bees but also creates a soft drowsy effect' will earn a mark or two.)

Do get students to look out for **personification**, where inanimate objects are given human qualities (e.g. 'the tree clawed at the sky') but again, they should only need reminding of the term at this stage.

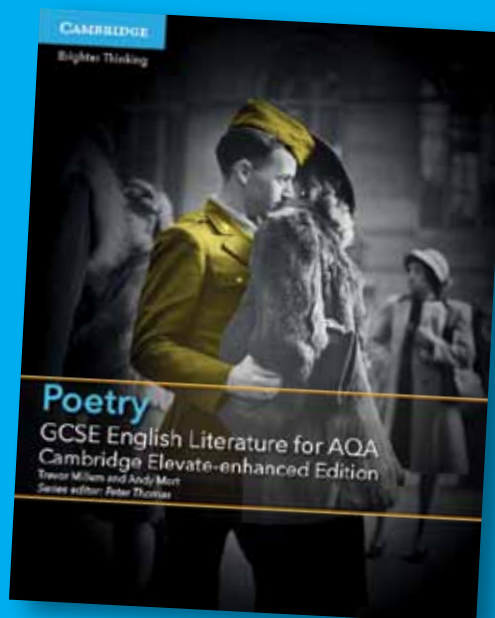
Often the most revealing moments come from noticing quite basic things. **Repetition** is a key indicator of something going on. Other aspects to look at are **tense** and **person**. Is the poem in the present or a past tense and what difference would it make if it were changed? Is the poem told in first or third person (sometimes, but rarely, it's second person)? If first, is it the voice of the poet, or that of a character created by the poet?

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