

## Year 11 into 12 Transition Task Two

Subject	English Literature
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This work is intended to support your ability to successfully make the transition to A Level study. You **do not** need to send this work to us.

### Task 2: June (Poetry based)

#### The Darkling Thrush by Thomas Hardy

Find the poem 'A Darkling Thrush' by Thomas Hardy online. Read through the poem very carefully. You will need to do this several times. (In fact, you should always read poems several times.)

Respond, in detail, to the following questions (provide evidence where you can):

- Is the ending of the poem positive or negative?
- Are there any words that you are unsure about? Get into the habit of looking them up and make a note of their meaning.

Explaining exactly 'how to read a poem' is tricky as there is no set formula, and it is something you have to learn for yourself, through practising, and through discussion. Our lessons will be more like seminars, not lectures, and I will be expecting you to have lots of ideas and comments to make. Find someone in your house who can give you 10 minutes of their time – read the poem to them and explain to them what you think the poem is about and what Hardy's message was.

Below is one example of an attempt to try to establish some ways of approaching the question of 'how to read a poem'. It comes from a book by John Peck and Martin Coyle, called 'Practical Criticism'. You may find it useful as a set of basic guidelines. Read through:

- Do look for tension, conflict or opposition in the poem.
- Do look for positive images and impressions that can be set against negative images and impressions.
- Do concentrate on the opening lines. You don't need to sort out the poem as a whole at this stage. You are simply concerned with getting an initial confident hold of the poem.
- Do try to see the larger issue that lies behind the particular details of the poem; the tension you have spotted could help you identify the larger issue.
- Don't try to analyse the whole poem in advance. If you try to do this, you are likely to tie yourself in knots.
- Don't, at the outset, worry about details you don't understand in the poem. Such details can be dealt with later. (But do look up words you don't know.)
- Don't get side-tracked. You are analysing a poem. Concentrate on the effects that are actually taking place in the poem.

Use this template to help you answer the following questions:

1. Where is there tension, conflict or opposition in the poem?
2. What are the negative and positive images or language in the poem?
3. What atmosphere is established by the opening lines?
4. What is the poem really about? (Is it just about a thrush or is there some other theme?)
5. What is the effect on you? And how has it achieved this effect?
6. Does knowing the date of the poem help you to read it?

In order to talk about poetry in any detail, you need to adopt a more detailed vocabulary that enables you to describe and analyse poetry's very particular use of language. Below is a list of techniques. Look up the definitions and make a note of them:

- Alliteration
- Metaphor
- Rhyme
- Rhyme Scheme
- Simile
- Parallelism
- Personification

Find examples in the poem where these have been used. What effects do these techniques produce? How do they contribute to the overall sense of what the poem is about?

### **La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats (translation: The Beautiful Woman without Pity)**

Find the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' by John Keats online. Read through the poem very carefully. You will need to do this several times.

Respond, in detail, to the following questions (provide evidence where you can):

- This poem has two speakers: What does the first speaker ask of the Knight? Does the question receive an answer?
- How is the Knight represented? Is he typical of what you would expect of a Knight?
- How is the woman in the poem represented? How might this relate to the poem's title? Is there anything ambiguous about her?
- How do you interpret the Knight's dream?
- Is the problem with the Lady or the Knight?
- What examples of poetic techniques can you find in the poem? What are the effects of them?
- Google 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci paintings' – what interpretations of the poem do the paintings offer? (You could print them out and stick them into your notebook or copy and paste them to your word doc.)
- What atmosphere is established by the opening lines?
- Where is there tension, conflict or opposition in the poem?
- What are the negative and positive images or language in the poem?
- What do you think the poem is really about? How does it make you feel?

## The Lady of Shalott by Tennyson

Find the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' by John Keats online. Read through the poem very carefully. You will need to do this several times.

Respond, in detail, to the following questions (provide evidence where you can):

One notion about poetry that you might believe is that the poet produces poetry from him or herself by the mysterious force of 'inspiration'. This view is particularly associated with the Romantic period (roughly 1789-1832). Romantic poets, like John Keats, privilege the originality and the imagination of the poet. However, poets have always made use of materials outside of their own thoughts and feelings: myths, legends, Biblical stories etc. Keats 'La belle Dame Sans Merci' is itself part of a tradition of fairy mythology. Below is part of a translation, published in 1825 by Thomas Roscoe. It is a translation of a medieval Italian novelette entitled 'Donna di Scalotta' (The Lady of Scalot'). This novelette is widely regarded as one of Tennyson's sources for his poem. Read through the passage:

***A daughter of the great Barbarossoro became passionately attached to Launcelot of the Lake; but so far from returning her love, he bestowed all his affections on the fair Queen Ginevra. To such a degree did her unhappy attachment arise, that she at length fell a victim to it, and died, leaving a bequest, that as soon as her soul had departed, her body should be transported on board a barge fitted up for the purpose, with a rich couch, and adorned with velvet stuffs, and precious stones, and ornaments: and thus arrayed in her proudest attire, with a bright golden crown upon her brows, she was to be borne alone to the place of residence of her beloved. Beneath her silver zone was found a letter to the following tenor: but we must first mention what ought to precede the letter itself. Everything was exactly fulfilled as she had appointed, respecting the vessel without sail or oars, helmsman, or hands to guide her; and so, with its lifeless freight, it was launched upon the open waves. Thus she was borne along by the winds, which conveyed her direct to Camelot, where the barge rested itself upon the bank. A rumour immediately spread through the court, and a vast train of barons and cavaliers ran out of the palace, followed soon by King Arthur himself. They stood mute with astonishment, on observing the strange vessel there, without voice or a hand to stir her out of the dead calm in which she lay. The king was first to set his foot upon her side, and he there beheld the gentle lady surrounded with the pomp of her death. He too first unclasped the zone, and cast his eye over the letter, directed – "To all the Knights of the Round Table, greeting, from the poor lady of Scalot, who invokes long health and fortune for the proudest lances of the world. Do they wish to learn, how I am thus fearfully brought before them? Let my last hand witness that it was, at once, or the sake of the noblest and vilest of cavaliers of the land – for the proud Knight, Launcelot of the Lake. For neither tears nor sighs of mine availed with him, to have compassion on my love. And this, alas, you behold me dead – fallen a victim only for loving too true."***

1. How do you think Tennyson has used this source text?
2. What additions and alterations has Tennyson made to the story? Is the 'original' a better story than Tennyson's adaptation?
3. Look up the term 'allegory'. Does reflecting on this source text, and on what Tennyson has done with it, give you any insight into the use of allegory?
4. Tennyson published a republished 'The Lady of Shalott' in several different versions: first published version was printed in 1832 and the second version was published in 1843. Read through parts 1 and 4 of each – you will notice that they are different.
5. Compare and contrast the two different versions. How are they different? What does he leave out and what does he add?
6. Why do you think Tennyson republished with differences?
7. Is the earlier version closer to the source text? Why? How?
8. In your opinion, is the later version 'better' or 'worse' than the first version? Explain your answer in detail.
9. What examples of poetic techniques can you find in the poem? What are the effects of them?

10. Google 'The Lady of Shalott paintings' – what interpretations of the poem do the paintings offer? (You could print them out and stick them into your notebook or copy and paste them to your word doc.)
11. What atmosphere is established by the opening lines?
12. Where is there tension, conflict or opposition in the poem?
13. What are the negative and positive images or language in the poem?
14. What do you think the poem is really about? How does it make you feel?

Read and research 'The Songs of Innocence and Experience' by William Blake

We study this collection in the first year of your A Level course. You can read the collection online and make notes on each poem (what you think the poem is about, Blake's message, any techniques used, effect on the reader etc.)

If you have any questions, please email [english@manor.school](mailto:english@manor.school)