

Year 9 – Modern Poetry

READING POETRY AND THINKING ABOUT IT

We can make sense of a poem by using **WHAT-HOW-WHY** to think about it.

- **WHAT** might the poem be describing? What tone does it use? What emotions does it convey?
- **HOW** is the poet helping me visualise what's described? How are the tone and emotions established?
- **WHY** might the poet be describing the situation in this way? Why might they have used that tone?

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

caesura – punctuation in the middle of a line.
end-stopping – punctuation at the end of a line.
enjambment – one line flows into the next.
free verse – no rhythm or rhyme scheme.
rhythm – the beat of a line in a poem create by the pattern of stressed & unstressed syllables.
rhyme scheme – the pattern of rhyming words.
stanza – a group of lines in a poem (a verse).
volta – a turning point in a poem when the tone or message changes dramatically.

LANGUAGE FEATURES

alliteration – words placed close together that start with the same sound.
connotations – the associations we have with words.
imagery – language that creates pictures in your mind.
metaphor – describing something as being something else.
onomatopoeia – word sounds like its meaning, e.g. slap.
oxymoron – a phrase that appears to contradict itself.
plosive – words that start with hard sounds: b, d, g, k, p, t.
sibilance – repetition of the 's' sound.
simile – describing something as being like something else.

QR Codes

BBC Bitesize: What to look for in a poem



Penguin Books: Nine Types of Poem



The Poetry Society



Title: A flag denotes a nation's emblem. It connotes patriotism, pride and celebration.

Verb choices to describe the movements of flags have positive associations with height, peacefulness, grace and freedom – undermined by the realities that follow.

Image of kneeling has double meaning: devotion & desperation.

Image of guts links to ideas of bravery but is unromantic compared to hearts & suggests brutality rather than nobility.

Plosive words such as blood, piece, dares and coward create a harsh, angry tone.

Modal verb 'will' expresses certainty that the flag will outlast those who die in its name. Implies it will go on to fool others to sacrifice their lives.

Connotations of the verb 'possess' implies desire, envy, and the view that the flag is valuable.

Image blindness is shocking. Just as love is sometimes blind to harsh realities, so is patriotism.

Flag

What's that **fluttering** in the breeze?
It's just a piece of cloth
that brings a nation to its knees.

What's that **unfurling** from a pole?
It's just a piece of cloth
that makes the guts of men grow bold.

What's that **rising** over the tent?
It's just a piece of cloth
that dares the coward relent.

What's that **flying** across a field?
It's just a piece of cloth
that **will** outlive the blood you bleed.

How can I possess such a cloth?
Just ask for a flag my friend.
Then blind your conscience to the end.

John Agard

Structure: Organised in 3-line stanzas (tercets) with a question-and-answer pattern to encourage the reader to question the relationship between nationalism & conflict.

Repetition of this central line emphasises the idea that the flag doesn't deserve the respect or worship it receives.

Rhythm is different for each line but consistently repeated in each stanza adding to the way the poem undermines stereotypical ideas about flags.

Rhyme scheme is ABA which creates an uncomfortable link between positive and negative images, sometimes using half-rhymes & broken in the final stanza which is ABB.

The voice in the poem becomes more personal towards the end. The pronouns 'I' and 'you' / 'your' makes it clear that there are two speakers and creates a greater sense of confrontation between the naïve questioner and the disillusioned respondent.

End-stopping contributes to the sense sharp, clipped tone of the poem which matches its militaristic imagery. The final stanza breaks the pattern with all three lines end-stopped, enhancing the message that flags result in just one conclusion: death.