

# 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 naive 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.