

## 2005 Year 12 Refresher Course

### SHARED STUDIES: A study of Poetry

#### From the Curriculum Statement

The Curriculum Statement for English Studies, available at <http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/docs/cs-2005/engl-cs-2005.doc>, stipulates that the 'Shared Studies' include a study of poetry and that this is a study of 'at least 1000 lines of poetry, most of which must come from one of the anthologies in the list of prescribed texts.'

The poetry texts are listed as follows:

Author	Title	Publisher
Barnes, J., & McFarlane, B.	<i>Cross Country</i>	Out of print
Gilbert, K. (ed.)	<i>Inside Black Australia</i>	Penguin
Hampton, S., & Llewellyn, K. (eds)	<i>The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets</i>	Penguin Out of print
Leonard, John (ed.)	<i>Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology</i>	OUP
Lever, S. (ed.)	<i>The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse</i>	OUP
McFarlane, P., & Temple, L. (eds)	<i>Blue Light, Clear Atoms</i>	Pan Macmillan
McKenzie, J. (ed.)	<i>Lines to Time</i>	Reed Education
McKenzie, J.A., & McKenzie, J. K. (eds)	<i>The World's Contracted Thus</i>	Out of print

The Curriculum Statement goes on to say that "the study of poetry should be designed to address the ideas, experiences, and emotions that poets explore and express, and the particular textual features that they use. Students should therefore be made familiar with aspects of style, imagery, word choice, and technique so that they develop an awareness of the poet's role in constructing the text to shape the response of the reader, and of the interaction of poet and reader. The study will allow students to consider a range of interpretations and readings.

The poetry study is a shared class activity in which teachers, in negotiation with the students, choose a range of poems which total at least 1000 lines, and most of which come from one of the anthologies in the list of prescribed texts. The selection must allow students to consider and compare the characteristics of particular poets but should also include a wider range of poems to cover students' individual interests and choices.

More information on the choice of poems and strategies suitable for this study is available in the support materials on the SSABSA website ([www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au](http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au))"

#### Assessment Component 1: Examination

This assessment component is designed to assess primarily Learning Outcomes 1 to 6, and 8. It is weighted at 30%.

The 3-hour external examination will require candidates to write three responses. It will be divided into three sections and students must choose one question from each section:

??Section A will contain questions on the study of two single texts *or* the study of paired texts *or* the study of poetry. The study that is the focus of this section in any given year will not be known in advance.

??Section B will contain questions on the two studies not addressed in Section A.

??Section C will contain questions based on the critical reading of one or more unseen short texts.

### **Criteria for Judging Performance**

The student's performance in the examination will be judged by the extent to which he or she demonstrates:

#### *understanding and analysis*

??To what extent does the student demonstrate knowledge of texts?

??How clearly does the student recognise and explain an author's use of textual features to communicate ideas and influence the reader's response?

??How effectively does the student describe the connections between texts?

??To what extent does the student recognise the characteristics of different text types?

??How well does the student understand the interrelationship of audience, purpose, and form in texts?

#### *application*

??How precise is the student in responding to the meaning and intention of the set questions?

??How well does the student develop an argument in response to the set questions?

??To what extent does the student use evidence from the texts to support his or her argument, analysis, or discussion?

??How effectively does the student integrate quotations into the line of discussion?

#### *communication*

??How accurate and fluent is the student's expression?

??How appropriate are the form and register for the audience and purpose?

### **Questions on Poetry Texts from recent examination papers:**

#### **QUESTIONS ON POETRY TEXTS from 2004**

*In your answer you must refer to a range of poems or poets.*

1. Was the view of the world presented in the poetry you studied this year predominantly hopeful or despairing?

2. To what extent did the contrast between poems you studied this year make you aware that poets present different responses to the same issues?

3. How did the poets you studied this year use the experiences of individuals to illustrate aspects of life that matter to us all?

4. 'Poetry's emotional impact comes more from the way it is composed than from its subject matter.'

Discuss this statement in relation to the poetry you studied this year.

5. What techniques did the poets you studied this year use to present various aspects of the role

of women in society?

6. Was it a sense of belonging or a feeling of isolation that dominated the poetry you studied this year?

#### **PART 2: QUESTIONS ON POETRY TEXTS from 2003**

*In answer to questions in this part you must refer to a range of poems or poets.*

13. How do the poets you studied this year use particular textual features to explore ideas and emotions?

14. 'No man is an island.' How has your study of poetry this year shown that human beings share common experiences and feelings?
15. How has the poetry you studied this year developed your appreciation of other times and other places?

**PART 2: QUESTIONS ON POETRY TEXTS from 2002**

*In answer to questions in this part you must refer to a range of poems or poets.*

13. How do poets you studied this year show that they are reluctant to accept aspects of the world around them?
14. 'Poetry often raises more questions than it answers.' To what extent was this your experience of the poetry you studied this year?
15. Show how poets you studied this year develop universal themes through simple images.
16. To what extent do the poets you studied this year suggest that human existence is too full of hardship to be worth celebrating?
17. How do poets you studied this year use aspects of childhood to develop ideas in their poetry?
18. Show how the precise use of sounds and images makes the ideas in the poetry you studied this year so striking.

## Starting Out

For many teachers and their students a common starting point to the study of poetry is the Curriculum Statement and in particular the poetry requirements, as outlined above, and the exam.

## How many poets/poems?

The question of how many poets and how many poems they need to know is a vexed one, however they will be expected to refer to a range of poems or poets in their exam. I think that students should explore poems by four poets at the very least. They should also be able to write about at least six poems and three poets in detail in the exam, as well as refer to others.

## What do they know about poetry, and what do they need to know?

You could start by asking students to write their own definition of poetry, or at least to offer one, before suggesting a few of your own. My favourite remains Samuel Taylor Coleridge's:

“Prose = Words in the Best Order

Poetry = The Best Words in the Best Order.”

It is evident from the curriculum statement that students will also need to be aware of ‘aspects of style, imagery, word choice and technique...’ and I have in the past often distributed to students a photocopied chapter on poetical technique and a glossary of poetical terms. I'd like to think that I'd also start by determining what they already know about poetry and use this as a starting point. The chapter on versification which I distributed at the workshop comes from Scannell, Vernon. *How To Enjoy Poetry*. London: Piatkus Publishers, 1983. I suspect that it is out of print although a small number of ex-library copies are available on Amazon.com. If you would like a copy of this chapter please contact Lucy Carberry in the SAETA office on 8332 2845.

I also like the idea of making up sheets each with a poetical term for prominent display on the classroom wall with space for a definition, an example and an explanation of the effect. (Don't you hate it when a student tells you that they've found several similes in a poem and leaves it at that?) Students could be given responsibility for writing the definition of one such term with an example and these could then be added to by others during the course of study. Here's just one example:

## Assonance

**Definition:** The repetition of a vowel sound in a sequence of nearby words.

**Example:** “Down some profound dull tunnel”

**Source:** ‘Strange Meeting by Wilfred Owen

*Space for students to add further examples*

**Effect:** Imitates the echoing sound from inside a cavern. It also accentuates the first word in each case ie ‘down’ and ‘dull’

### **Which Anthology?**

It would be appealing to be able to offer students a choice of anthology, however the reality is that in most schools there will probably only be class sets of one or two from the list of prescribed texts.

It may be possible to convince your class to purchase their own copy of one of the anthologies if you really wanted to explore one which your school does not stock. Poetry anthologies are however expensive to purchase and difficult to find. I am informed that *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* is now out of print as well as *Cross Country* and *The World's Contracted Thus*. I also had difficulty finding a bookshop in Adelaide which stocked *Inside Black Australia*, *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology*, and *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse*.

It is likely that you will find that your school will have one or more of the following: *Cross Country*, *Clear Light*, *Blue Atoms*, or *The World's Contracted Thus/Lines to Time*.

### **Which Poems/Poets?**

I suspect that even though students have chosen to undertake English Studies that they are still less than enthusiastic about the study of poetry about which they have no choice. One way to give them a little more ownership of the course of study is to give them a choice of anthology as I've suggested above, another is to negotiate with them the poets/poems which they will explore. I note that the Curriculum Statement actually states that the poems should be chosen "in negotiation with the students."

There are, of course, a number of approaches taken by teachers ranging from those who hand out the 'chosen' anthology and permit students freedom to choose the poetry the class will study, to those who carefully select the poets and the poems.

A middle approach is to offer the class some possible groupings. I've found that the following have proved successful:

- ?? *Poetry through the ages*: Chaucer, Shakespeare (I started this offering when I stopped studying a Shakespearean play and felt guilty), a Romantic and a modern poet
- ?? *Poetry from across the globe*: Oswald Mtshali, Robert Frost, Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal Tribe, and Seamus Heaney.
- ?? *Female Poets*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Gwen Harwood, Judith Wright, Sylvia Plath, Ooderoo of the tribe Noonuccal,
- ?? *Modern Australian Poets*: Geoff Goodfellow, Jeri Kroll, Mark O'Connor, Les Murray, Bruce Dawe

I've found that the first two have proved most popular in recent years, and that the first option despite the difficulties that many have with Chaucer has been particularly rewarding for students.

One further approach is to consider poems which can be linked by a theme or idea such as:

- ?? *Carpe Diem*, eg 'Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may', 'To His Coy Mistress' 'Birches'

- ?? *The transient nature of life and how we might 'cheat' death eg 'Death be not proud, though some have called thee so', 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day'+ others by Shakespeare, 'Ode to a Nightingale'*
- ?? *War*
- ?? *Death*
- ?? *Love and relationships...*

*Lines to Time* and *Blue Light Clear Atoms* each contain lists of suggested themes and poems linked by theme.

Whatever process is used for determining which poems and which poets I believe that the program should be flexible enough to permit students to explore poems of their own choosing. However, if they are to explore any poems, many students will need support to read poetry.

### **Setting the context**

Once you have agreed on the poets for shared study, or at least one to start with, I like to place the chosen poet and his/her poetry in the appropriate historical, cultural and social context.

For poets such as Chaucer, for example, I've often resorted to story telling and what I suspect is 'creative imagining'. Even students in the senior years are happy to close their eyes while you, the teacher, take them on an imaginary journey through time to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Without an understanding of life in England at that time it is hard to appreciate the significance of spring and the appeal of a pilgrimage to Canterbury. It doesn't have to come from the teacher. Extracts from other texts such as films and novels can provide useful contextual understanding. Students themselves could carry out their own research.

The danger of such an approach is that students can spend too much time researching biographical detail rather than learning about the poet from his or her poetry. However, it is useful to place the poems in their social and historical context to assist students to appreciate the big issues of the time, the purpose of the poets and who they were writing for.

### **Reading Poetry**

Poetry should be read aloud, at least **I** need to hear the sound of the words to really appreciate the musical qualities of the language. I also suspect that a large number of students do not have strategies for reading poetry and that we who have developed these, need to support them to do so. Most students are skilful readers of prose which they usually only need to read once to understand it.

We can, of course, tell students that they need to read poems three times at least, and that the first reading is one in which they don't worry about the meaning but that they should try and sense the mood. You can suggest that if the poem is punctuated that they read it sentence by sentence on a subsequent reading as they struggle to come to terms with the meaning. You might even suggest something like the following:

- ?? read the title, record your thoughts,
- ?? read the poem once through quickly, record your thoughts,

- ?? read the poem through again highlighting words or phrases which stand out or need explanation, record these observations,
- ?? read the poem again noting the punctuation and interpret it in your own words...

Whatever approach you favour I would also encourage you to model the process you use for interpreting a poem in front of the class. Let them know what is going on inside your head as you interpret a poem.

### Collaborative Reading Exercises

To support students to develop the confidence to read poetry I offer the following three examples of collaborative reading exercises which Wendy Morgan introduced us to back in the early 90s. Wendy introduced them as collaborative learning exercises which could be carried out around a PC. However, each will also work without one and each does stimulate discussion about poetry. You might in the first instance like to select a group of students and model the process in front of the rest of the class. Try using the cloze exercise below in which Chaucer describes the Miller in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*.

The collaborative tasks:

[A close exercise](#)

[Reversifying a poem which has been written out as prose](#)

[Reordering a poem in which the lines, or stanzas have been mixed up.](#)

In each case students should be encouraged to work in small groups of preferably no more than four. One student should be a scribe who captures the thinking which goes on in the group and the justification for the decisions they reach. Students should be encouraged to consider the clues available to them such as a rhyme scheme, a metre, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc

The following example was sourced from: <http://www.towson.edu/~duncan/chaucer/>  
It includes some help with interpretation of some words which you may wish to delete.

The millere was a stout [carlguy](#), fellow for the [nones](#) any occasion;  
Ful \_\_\_ he was of brawn, and eek of \_\_\_.  
That proved wel, for [over al ther](#) everywhere he cam,  
At wrastlyng he wolde have alwey the \_\_\_.  
He was short-sholdred, brood, a [thikke knarre](#) stocky fellow;  
Ther was no \_\_\_ that he [nolde heve of harre](#) wouldn't knock off its hinges,  
Or breke it at a [rennyng](#) running with his \_\_\_ head.  
His berd as any sowe or \_\_\_ was reed,  
And therto brood, as though it were a \_\_\_.  
Upon the [cop right](#) very tip of his nose he hade  
A \_\_\_ wart, and theron stood a [toft of herys](#) tuft of hairs,  
\_\_\_ as the [brustles](#) bristles of a [sowes erys](#) sow's ears;  
His [nosethirles](#) nostrils blake were and \_\_\_.  
A swerd and [bokeler](#) shield bar he by his syde.  
His mouth as greet was as a greet \_\_\_ cauldron.  
He was a [janglere](#) big mouth and a [goliardeys](#) ribald story teller,  
And that was moost of synne and [harlotries](#) vulgarities.

Wel koude he [stelen cornsteal grain](#) and [tollen thriescharge triple](#);  
And yet he hadde a thombe of \_\_\_\_, pardee.  
A whit cote and a [blewblue](#) hood wered \_\_\_\_.  
A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and [sowneplay](#),  
And [therwithalin that way](#) he broghte us out of \_\_\_\_.

Chaucer and Shakespeare lend themselves to this type of exercise with their strong iambic beat and regular rhyme schemes. I also like the use of alliteration and short monosyllabic words in the above example to create a rather harsh sound which seems an entirely appropriate choice for this character.

When students have explored at least three poems by one poet in collaborative activities such as these you could ask them to write a detailed analysis of at least one of the poems. There are several strategies for supporting students to write an analysis of a poem and the one I've used asks students to SMILE at a poem. That is they write about Subject, Mood, Imagery, Language and then Evaluate it. I offer an example of my own as [a model](#) on one of Shakespeare's sonnets.

### **Timing**

Rather than try and read 1000 lines of poetry in one block, I've usually broken the study of poetry down into bite size chunks. I start with a three week block sometime in term 1 and then provide students with two week blocks in Terms 2 and 3, followed by a further week in Term 4.

### **Performance Poetry**

When students explore their second poet I often ask them to work in small groups again and to explore one poem which they will then present to the class dramatically. Some poets clearly lend themselves more to dramatic presentation than others and once again I believe in modelling what I mean. I have for example taken the class outside to a paved area and lined them up as recruits and then, dressed up as a drill sergeant, have barked Bruce Dawe's 'Weapon's Training' at them.

Over the years there have been some memorable performances, which have stayed with me, and hopefully they stayed with the students too when they needed to draw on their knowledge of poetry to answer a question in the exam.

One group used grey sheets to transform the classroom into the trenches of World War I before delivering a haunting presentation of 'Exposure'. Another, also presenting a poem by Owen, read the poem in darkness with flashing lights and sound effects for the exploding shells. Another group transformed the drama suite into Oswald Mtshali's 'Native Hut', while another dressed as millers before presenting a rousing rendition of the above lines describing Chaucer's Miller.

I've found that this task engages the interest of students and encourages them to explore poems in detail. In addition I have asked each group to explain what they hoped to achieve by performing the poem as they did. [See worksheet](#).

### **Responses which make use of ICTs**

For the third and fourth poets you might like to encourage students to present poems making use of ICTs. Alison Robertson asked individuals to [write a film script](#) to

accompany the reading of a poem which is [attached](#). Groups might also collaborate to use ICTs to present poems. Images to display Autumn could be presented using PowerPoint, for example, with an appropriate musical backing, is Vivaldi too obvious?

A short video could be made using digital cameras and software such as IMac, or Movie Maker....

### **Gathering it all together**

Students do need to be able to compare and contrast the poetry they have explored. To support them to do this I have employed the attached [grid](#) which we have completed initially as a shared activity as a means of exploring possible connections as well as for reflecting on the poems studied.

### **Writing a Poetry Essay**

When you have finished exploring the poetry and have gathered it all together it is time to give students the opportunity to practise writing a poetry essay under exam conditions. I have sometimes written my own essay alongside my students, partly to prove that it could be done and to provide students with an example of what a poetry essay might look like. The attached essay was written under such conditions several years ago and has since been polished. Linked to it is a template for writing the essay, and there is also an annotated version of the essay in which I attempt to explain what I have done in the essay.

[Poetry Essay](#)

[Annotated Essay](#)

[Essay Writing Template](#)