

## UNSEEN POETRY

Half the things you did were too scary for me.  
Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.

“I STOOD at the back of the shop, my dear,  
The set seed and the first bulbs showing.  
Slideshow faces flicker from the station.  
Remember me when I am gone away,  
How they strut about, people in love,  
If I were hanged on the highest hill,  
O hushed October morning mild,  
Love is like the wild rose-briar,  
They have watered the street,  
My lifelong friend, dear heart,  
My love is an aviary  
At the last party,

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# Introduction

This GCSE pack is designed to prepare students for the unseen poetry element of the English Literature GCSE.

The pack has been devised for use with the AQA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC Eduqas specifications for GCSE English Literature. The activities and ideas will help students to develop confidence in approaching unseen poems, exploring the key elements including language, structure and tone.

The pack contains six pairs of poems with accompanying resources (including a comparison resource), teaching notes and practice exam questions. The resources have been created in a specific order and are designed to empower students and improve their confidence as they work their way through the pack.

Each resource has space for student answers and notes so they can easily keep track of their work - excellent for revision!

There is a final pair of poems with practice exam questions (no resources or teaching notes) so that students can gain realistic exam experience. Please note that the final pair of poems are quite challenging so you might like to provide your students with some contextual information for these.

The poems are paired in units as follows:

1. 'At The Draper's' by Thomas Hardy with 'Remember' by Christina Rossetti
2. 'Late Love' by Jackie Kay with 'Love and Friendship' by Emily Brontë
3. 'Finding the Keys' by Robin Robertson with 'October' by Robert Frost
4. 'Calling Card' by Tracey Herd with 'For Meg' by Fleur Adcock
5. 'A London Thoroughfare. 2 am' by Amy Lowell with 'Frost Fair' by Rowyda Amin
6. 'Long Life' by Elaine Feinstein and 'Fish oil, exercise and no wild parties' by Beatrice Garland
7. 'An Aviary of Small Birds' by Karen McCarthy Woolf and 'Mother o'Mine' by Rudyard Kipling

*Our thanks go to contributor Trevor Millum who has written this pack.*

## Teaching notes



### 'Remember'

Christina Rossetti  
(1830-1894)

#### First encounter

- 'Remember' is not a particularly difficult poem but students may need some help with the context of Victorian notions of love and death. However, for some students it may be helpful to read the poem without the verse form:

Remember me when I am gone away, gone far away into the silent land; when you can no more hold me by the hand, nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day you tell me of our future that you planned: only remember me; you understand it will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while and afterwards remember, do not grieve: for if the darkness and corruption leave a vestige of the thoughts that once I had, better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad.

- The poem is a personal one which prompts the question, why did the writer publish a poem which appears to be written to a particular person with a private and very personal message?

#### Getting closer to the poem

- The terms that students choose are less important than their reasons. Developing a vocabulary to describe tone or the general impact of a poem (or any piece of writing) is a key skill so help and encouragement here is valuable. Tease out why 'resigned' or 'philosophical' might be better descriptors than 'sad', for example.

#### Structure

- At this stage, students should be able to recognise a sonnet. If not, a short revision session is in order! They do not need to know the intricacies of Shakespearean or Petrarchan forms, just a basic understanding.

- There is a change at the beginning of the sestet, and Rossetti indicates this clearly with the word 'Yet'. See if students can put this into their own words, such as "She wants him to remember her but then she says it's all right if he forgets her for a while ..."

### Language - the words on the page

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- Students will notice the obvious repetition of 'remember' but might miss all the personal pronouns: so many uses of 'I', 'me' and 'you'. These have the cumulative effect of making this a very personal message. There is also a significant number of negatives: 'forget', 'no', 'nor', 'not' ... By the end of the poem, we are not likely to forget the theme!
- Adjectives are used sparsely and, for a poem which is about thoughts and feelings, there are a lot of active verbs: 'hold', 'turn', 'stay', 'tell', 'planned' and so on as well as nouns. Although the message is hypothetical, it is expressed in a very concrete manner, with plenty of specific examples. It could have been a vague statement full of abstractions but is the more powerful for avoiding them.
- Asking students to pick out 'important' words is a way of getting them to read closely. It does not matter which words they choose, it is the discussion about the choices which will help understanding.

### Inside the poem

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- Rossetti uses very little imagery and not a lot can be made of the two examples, which offer little in the way of simile or metaphor! Interestingly, the very religious Rossetti sees death as silent, dark and rotting rather than a joyful afterlife.
- We want to get students into the habit of considering sound effects and there is a definite preponderance of long vowel sounds, which they should be able to notice. Whether this has any significance beyond contributing to the melody of the lines is debatable - but students may have some interesting suggestions.
- The rhyme and rhythm of the sonnet is obvious. How far it influences the reader or listener will depend on how it is read. Try reading it with an exaggerated da-dum da-dum rhythm which also emphasises the rhyme, and then contrast it with a more subtle interpretation. The poem should rise above its form.

### Response

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- Students' responses need to be directed away from a like/dislike reaction into something more considered. Most importantly, it should be possible to appreciate something without having to like it.



## 'Remember'

Christina Rossetti  
(1830-1894)

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

### First encounter

1. Read the poem through. Pause. Read it again.
2. Now read the first line and the last two lines. Sum up what you think the poem is about.

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.....  
.....



3. Do you think the writer of the poem, Rossetti, is also the 'I' in the poem? Why do you think that?

.....  
.....  
.....



4. Is the poem aimed at a general readership or a particular audience?

.....  
.....



### Getting closer to the poem

1. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Choose one of these descriptors or add your own and say why:

RESIGNED

Sad

Philosophical

Calm

Regretful

Emotional

.....  
.....  
.....





### Structure - the way the poem is built

1. The poem is written in a particular form, which you should recognise. If you do not, check with a partner and/or your teacher. In this form, there is often a change at about the ninth line so that the final lines offer a slight contrast to the first eight. What kind of change do you notice here?



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.....

### The words on the page

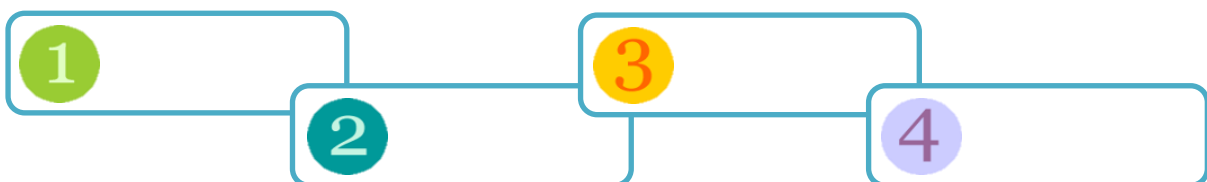
1. Now look at the language the poet uses. Would you say the words used are generally familiar to you? If there are any words - such as 'vestige' - that are unfamiliar, see if you can work out the likely meaning from the context.
2. What repetition do you notice? Don't forget to look out for little words such as pronouns. What is the significance of this repetition?

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.....  
.....

3. What is the overall balance between nouns, verbs and adjectives? There is no need to count them, a general impression is enough and may give you an insight into the poet's approach.

.....  
.....

4. What do you think are the most important words in the poem apart from the ones that are repeated?



### Inside the poem

1. **Imagery:** What do you think is the effect of 'silent land' and 'darkness and corruption'? Overall, what would you say about Rossetti's use of imagery?

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.....  
.....



2. **Sound:** Is there a particular vowel sound that is more common than others? What, if any, would be the effect of this repetition?

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3. **Rhyme and rhythm:** There is a very clear rhyme pattern and a rhythm to the poem. Do they, in your opinion, help or hinder an appreciation of the poem's message? Why?

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### Thoughts, response, conclusion

1. What is your personal response to the poem?

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