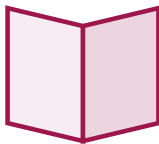


Poetry III

AP English Literature ■ Unit 8

AP English Literature



What we will cover

- 1 The Function of Structure in a Text
- 2 The Function of Contrasts Within a Text
- 3 The Function of Specific Words and Phrases
- 4 The Function of a Symbol
- 5 The Function of a Metaphor
- 6 The Function of an Allusion



The Function of Structure in a Text

Unit 8 is the last poetry unit and it handles the hardest material in the course: the family of devices built on **contradiction**.

- **Ideas and images in a poem may extend beyond a single line or stanza .**
- **Punctuation is often crucial** to understanding a text.
- **When structural patterns are created, any interruption in the pattern creates a point of emphasis .**

The Function of Structure in a Text, continued

That third statement is the most efficient reading tool in the course. Establish what the poem has been doing, then find the moment it stops doing it. That moment is where the poem points.

In a poem, a semicolon and a full stop are different claims about how tightly two statements are joined, and a poem without punctuation has made a decision about how you must read it.

Finding the turn

A CONJUNCTION — *but, yet, and still*, at the head of a line

A CHANGE OF TENSE
— the poem moves in time

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS —
it starts speaking to someone

A CHANGE OF SCALE — the
particular becomes general, or the reverse

The turn is where the poem stops doing one thing and starts another. Find it from the **signal**, and the structure question answers itself



Three devices built on contradiction

- **Juxtaposition** may create or demonstrate an **antithesis** .
- **Situational or verbal irony** is created when events or statements are **inconsistent with what is expected**.
- **Paradox** occurs when **seemingly contradictory elements are juxtaposed, but the contradiction - which may be at odds with ordinary logic - reveals a deeper truth**.

Three devices built on contradiction, in detail

What happens to the contradiction? That is the separating question

ANTITHESIS

two opposites placed
side by side

**both remain true
in their own terms**

*"the harvest, and the
emptied village"*

IRONY

a mismatch between
what is expected
and what is

**someone is aware
of the gap**

*"a generous year" - after
we have seen the cost*

PARADOX

a contradiction that
survives inspection

**the contradiction IS
the truth, not an error**

*"the fuller the barn, the
fewer to eat from it"*

Calling all three "irony" is the commonest lost mark in this unit.

Antithesis sets opposites side by side. Irony is a mismatch. A paradox contradicts and is still true

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

- **Juxtaposition** may create or demonstrate an antithesis .
- **Situational or verbal irony** is created when events or statements are inconsistent with what is expected.
- **Paradox** occurs when seemingly contradictory elements are juxtaposed, but the contradiction – which may be at odds with ordinary logic – reveals a deeper truth.



The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

In this course, ambiguity is a resource.

An essay that identifies a genuinely ambiguous element, explores both readings, and then argues for one is doing exactly what the sophistication point rewards – far more than an essay that pretends the text is simpler than it is.

Ambiguity, or vagueness?

AMBIGUITY — in the text

two readings, and the text supports both
you can quote for each
the tension between them is the point

VAGUENESS — in the reading

one reading, not yet worked out
“this could symbolise many things”
no quotation would settle it either way

Claiming ambiguity is a **commitment** to show both readings. Without the two quotations it reads as the essay declining to decide



The Function of a Symbol

A symbol is not free-floating.

Someone in the text is treating that object as meaningful, and asking *who* attaches this meaning is often more productive than asking what the meaning is.



The Function of a Metaphor

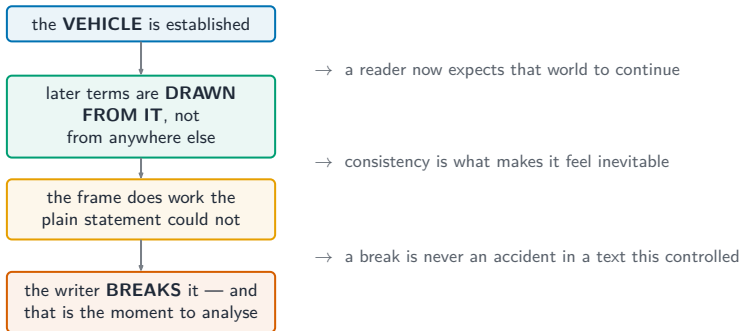
A conceit is an extended metaphor that has been pushed further than seems reasonable, and the strain is deliberate. When analysing one, follow how far the poet takes the comparison and where it starts to resist – the resistance is usually the poem's real subject.

- A **conceit** is a form of **extended metaphor**, common in poetry, developing **complex comparisons**.
- Conceits are often used to make **complex comparisons between the natural world and an individual**.
- **Multiple comparisons, representations, or associations may combine to affect one another** in complex ways.

An extended metaphor, to its break

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An extended metaphor, to its break, in detail



Conceits are often used to make **complex comparisons between the natural world and an individual**.



The Function of an Allusion

Note the condition: *shared knowledge*.

An allusion is a bet on the reader's memory, and a poem that alludes heavily has chosen its audience.

Symbol, allusion, and citing your sources

a symbol's reach

symbols in a text, and the way they are used, may imply that a narrator, character or speaker has a particular perspective

so

the symbol characterises the person who reaches for it, not only the thing it stands for

an allusion

because of shared knowledge about a reference, allusions create emotional or intellectual associations

the condition

it works only for readers who hold that knowledge – which is itself a claim about audience

attribution

writers must acknowledge the words, ideas, images, texts and intellectual property of others

in your essay

quote precisely, attribute clearly, and distinguish the critic's claim from your own

A symbol read as the *character's* choice rather than the author's is almost always the more sophisticated reading, and the CED says so explicitly.



Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- A thesis expresses an **interpretation** requiring textual defence.
- More sophisticated literary arguments explain the significance or relevance of an **interpretation** – the sophistication point, stated by the CED.
- Evidence: **strategic**, **effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, developed **recursively**.

Worked example – three devices, kept apart

A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the poet's use of contrast conveys a complex attitude.

- **Weak:** “[everything in the poem called irony]”
- **Scoring:** “The poem places the harvest against the emptied village – an antithesis, in which both are simply true. But the speaker calls the year ‘generous’ after showing what the generosity cost: that mismatch is verbal irony. ‘The fuller the barn, the fewer to eat from it’ is a paradox.”

Antithesis, irony and paradox are three different things. The paradox is the only statement the poem does not undercut – which is why it carries the conclusion.



Exam tips

- Establish the pattern, then find the interruption. The interruption is where the poem points.
- Punctuation is a claim about how tightly statements are joined. A poem without it has made a decision too.
- Antithesis, irony, paradox are not synonyms. Learn the three definitions precisely; conflating them costs marks.
- Ambiguity is a resource. Explore both readings, then argue for one. That is the sophistication point.
- Ask who attaches the meaning to a symbol. It is usually more productive than asking what it means.
- A conceit is a comparison pushed past comfort. Follow it to where it resists – that is the subject.



Unit 8 – key takeaways

1

Pattern

establish it, then find the interruption

2

Punctuation

a claim about how tightly statements join

3

Three devices

antithesis, irony, paradox – not synonyms

4

Ambiguity

explore both readings, then argue for one

Check yourself

- 1 Where does the poem point?
- 2 What is punctuation claiming?
- 3 Why not conflate antithesis, irony, paradox?
- 4 Ambiguity is a route to which point?

Answers: the interruption ■ how tightly statements are joined ■ they have different definitions ■ sophistication