

Poetry I

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 2 is the course's first poetry unit, and it adds two things to Unit 1's toolkit: **structure** as an object of analysis, and **figurative language** 比喻性语言 handled precisely rather than by name-dropping.

One addition on character first: **characters reveal their perspectives and biases** 视角与偏见 through **the words they use, the details they provide, and the details they omit** 略去的细节.

That last item is the analytical opening. What a speaker does *not* mention, in a poem where everything is chosen, is evidence.

The Function of Structure in a Text

- **Line and stanza breaks** 行与诗节的断开 contribute to the development and relationship of ideas in a poem.
- **The arrangement of lines and stanzas** contributes to that development.
- A text's structure **affects readers' reactions and expectations** by presenting the relationships among ideas.

Structure in poetry is not decoration; it is punctuation for thought. Where a line breaks decides which words sit at the ends of lines, and the end of a line is the most emphatic position available. A sentence that runs past a line break asks the reader to hold something unresolved; one that stops at the break closes it.

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

- **Contrast** 对照 can be introduced through **focus, tone, point of view, character or speaker perspective, and dramatic situation**.
- Contrasts are the result of **shifts or juxtapositions or both** 转换与并置.
- **Shifts may be signalled by a word, a structural convention, or punctuation**.
- Shifts may **emphasise contrasts between particular segments** of a text.

This is the most reliable route into an unseen poem. Find the shift - a *but*, a stanza break, a change of tense or address - and the poem divides into a before and an after. What changed, and what the change costs or gains, is very often the poem's argument.

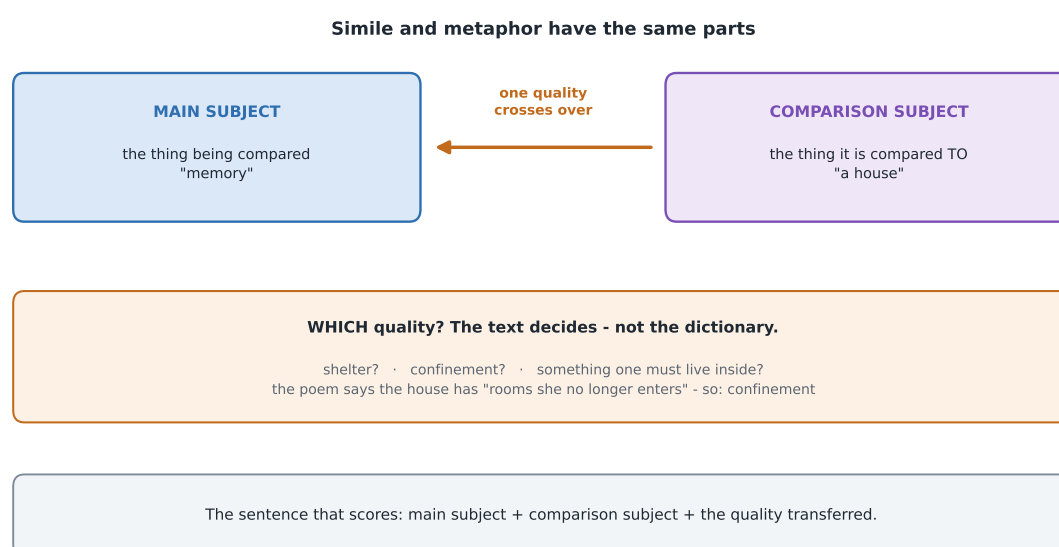
The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

- An **antecedent** 先行词 is a word, phrase, or clause that precedes its referent.

- **Referents are ambiguous if they can refer to more than one antecedent, which affects interpretation** 影响阐释.
- **Words or phrases may be repeated** to emphasise ideas or associations.
- **Alliteration** 头韵 is the repetition of the same initial sound in adjacent or nearby words, emphasising those words.

Ambiguous reference is worth special attention. In prose it is usually a fault; in poetry it is often a device, and a pronoun that could point two ways may be holding both meanings deliberately.

The Function of a Simile



Name the main subject, name the comparison subject, then say which quality crossed over

- A **simile** 明喻 uses **"like" or "as"** to liken two objects or concepts.
- Similes liken two different things **to transfer the traits or qualities of one to the other** 性质的转移.
- In a simile, the thing **being compared** is the **main subject**; the thing **to which it is compared** is the **comparison subject**.

Those two terms are the whole method. A scoring answer names the main subject, names the comparison subject, and then says **which quality was transferred** - because that quality is the claim the poem is making.

The Function of a Metaphor

- A **metaphor** 隐喻 **implies similarities between two usually unrelated concepts** to reveal or emphasise qualities of the main subject.
- The same main-subject and comparison-subject structure applies.

- Comparisons **draw on the experiences and associations** readers already have with the comparison subject - which is why a metaphor can fail with an audience that lacks those associations.
- **Interpretation of a metaphor may depend on the context of its use:** what is happening in the text may determine which of the comparison subject's qualities is meant.

That last point protects you from the commonest error, which is importing every association a word has. If a poem calls grief *a house*, the relevant quality might be shelter, or confinement, or the fact that one must live inside it. The text decides which.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

Same three components as Unit 1: a **claim** requiring textual defence, the **textual evidence**, and details identified **in combination**.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the speaker's use of comparison conveys their attitude. A weak answer: *"The poet uses a metaphor comparing memory to a house, which is effective."* A scoring answer uses the CED's terms and the context rule: *"The main subject is memory and the comparison subject a house, but the poem withholds warmth from the comparison: the house has 'rooms she no longer enters'. The quality transferred is therefore not shelter but confinement by a structure one built oneself - so the speaker's attitude to her own past is presented as inhabiting something she can neither leave nor fully occupy."* Main subject, comparison subject, transferred quality, and the attitude it conveys.

Exam tips

- What a speaker **omits** is evidence. In a poem, everything present was chosen.
- **Find the shift** first. A *but*, a stanza break, a change of tense - the poem divides there.
- **Line endings are the emphatic position.** Say which words the poet put there.
- An **ambiguous referent** in poetry is usually a device, not an error.
- Always name **main subject and comparison subject**, then the **quality transferred**. That quality is the claim.
- **Context decides which quality** a metaphor imports. Do not list every association the word has.