Close reading and Paper 1

IB DP English A: Literature Paper 1: guided literary analysis

Close reading and Paper 1

- explain what Paper 1 asks at SL and HL and plan your time;
- tell the speaker or **narrator** apart from the writer, and follow **tone** and the turn;
- name literary features and explain their effects;

Close reading and Paper 1 (2)

- make a **close reading** 细读 of a poem, as in the worked reading of Dickinson;
- write an analysis with a **thesis** and feature–evidence–effect paragraphs.

Who is speaking?

- The **speaker** 说话者 of a poem, or the **narrator** 叙述者 of a story, is a voice created by the writer.
- Do not assume it is the writer.
- Write "the speaker feels ..." rather than "Dickinson feels ...".
- Ask three questions first:

Literary features

- A literary feature is a choice the writer has made, and your job is to say what that choice does.
- Each row of the table gives a feature and a question to ask about it.
- You do not need all of them for one passage: three or four strong features, each followed to its effect, make a better answer than ten names in a list.

A worked close reading

- **Metaphor.** Hope is never called a bird, only "the thing with feathers". The reader completes the picture, so the idea feels discovered, not told.
- **Verbs.** "Perches" and "sings" make an abstract feeling act like a living creature inside the body ("in the soul").
- **"Without the words".** Hope does not need reasons or language; it continues even when we cannot explain why.

A worked close reading (2)

- **Dashes.** The many dashes slow the reader down and create small pauses. The final "- at all -" isolates two short words, so the line ends with stress on how endless hope is.
- **Sound.** "Soul" and "all" share a vowel sound but are not a full **rhyme** (a **half-rhyme** 半韵), which makes the stanza sound gentle and slightly unfinished, like a song that "never stops".

Writing the analysis

- 1. **Read and annotate** (about 20 minutes per passage): read twice; mark the speaker, the turn, and three or four strong features. 2. **Thesis 论点**: one or two sentences that answer the **guiding question**. 3. **Body paragraphs** (three or four): each makes one point, quotes a few words as evidence, names the feature, and explains its effect on the reader. 4. **Conclusion**: how the features work together.
- **Worked thesis.** *Guiding question: How does the poet present the power of hope?*

Writing the analysis (2)

- > Dickinson presents hope as a small, quiet but unstoppable force: by > turning it into a bird that sings "without the words", the poem > suggests that hope survives exactly where reason and language fail.
- **Worked paragraph.**

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Language A: Literature guide* (first assessment 2021).
- E. Dickinson, "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" (about 1861), in R. W. Franklin (ed.), *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (1999).
- T. H. Johnson (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955), the first edition to restore her dashes.
- M. H. Abrams and G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th edition, 2014).

Common errors

- Feature spotting: naming a **metaphor** or a **rhyme** without explaining its effect on the reader.
- Calling the speaker of a poem "the poet"; the speaker is a voice the writer creates.
- Retelling the passage instead of analysing how it works.

Common errors (2)

- Ignoring the **guiding question**, or answering it only in the conclusion.
- Writing about every feature you notice instead of the few that matter most to your **thesis**.
- Using long quotations; short, exact quotations woven into your sentences work better.

Key terms

- **Guiding question**: the question printed with each Paper 1 passage, which points to one aspect to analyse.
- **Speaker**: the voice that speaks in a poem, which is not the same as the poet.
- **Tone**: the attitude a text shows towards its subject or its reader.

Key terms (2)

- **Turn**: a change in a poem's direction, mood or argument.
- **Enjambment**: a sentence that runs over the end of a line of poetry without a pause.
- **Close reading**: careful analysis of the words, sounds and **structure** of a short passage.

Check yourself

- 1.
- How many passages, marks and minutes does Paper 1 have at HL and at SL? 2.
- Why should you write "the speaker" rather than "Dickinson" when analysing her poem? 3.
- In "'Hope' is the thing with feathers", what is the main **metaphor**, and what does it suggest about hope? 4.