CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge IGCSE / IGCSE (9-1) / O Level Literature in English

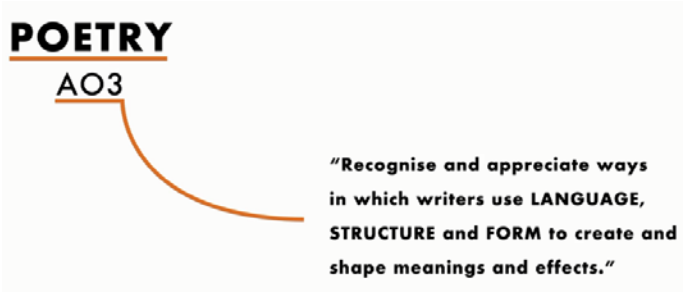
Teacher notes: Poetry AO3

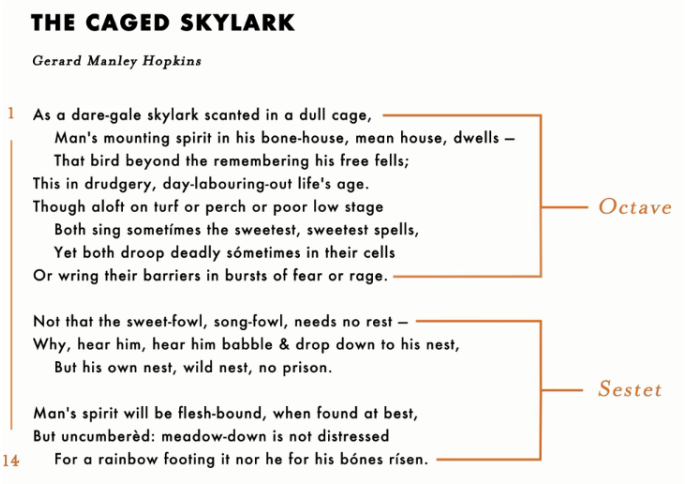
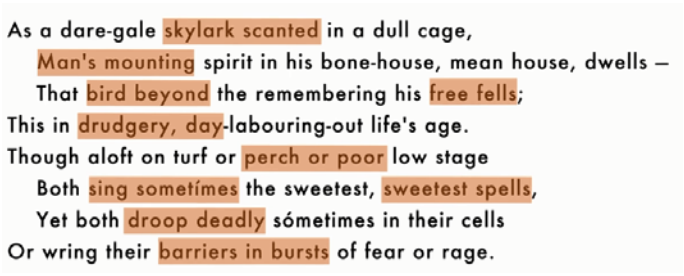
Note: These teacher notes accompany a video available on Resource Plus.

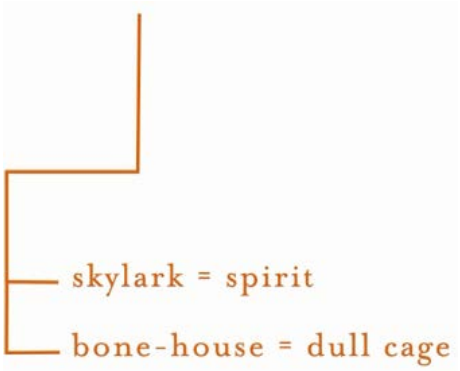
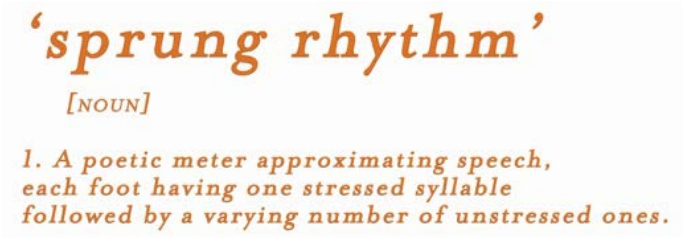
AO3: Recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure and form to create and shape meanings and effects.

Here are some notes to accompany the videos.

- Encourage learners to consider the impact and effect of language features, and not merely to identify them.
- The poem in this film has an extended metaphor relating to the caged skylark. It suggests something caged which should be free to sing. Could it be an **allegory** of the poet himself, or of sinful man? Notice the connection between AO1, AO2 and AO3. It is **language**, **structure and form** which help to identify the deeper meanings of a text, allowing an interpretation to go beyond surface meaning.
- Consider the relationship between structure and meaning in poems which your learners are studying.
- Consider the effects of rhythm on tone and on mood. **Tone** is the music of the poem, how we hear it, and **mood** the effect which this has on the reader, what it makes us feel.
- Then look more at individual words and groups of words, such as **alliterative** patterns (word beginning with the same letter) and other patterns of repetition which link words, or contrasts (or **juxtaposition**) of images or connotations. There are many rhyme patterns in Hopkins's 'The Caged Skylark': the two **quatrains** (4 -line sections) which make up the **octave** (8-line section) in the sonnet repeats the same rhyme sounds. Similarly the two **tercets** (3-line sections) which make up the **sestet** (6-line section) also repeat the same rhymes. This could be demonstrated to learners. Similarly, there are more patterns of **alliteration** than those briefly illustrated in the film.
- Hopkins uses a specific form of metre called 'sprung rhythm'. However, in most English poetry the pattern of strong and weak **stresses** puts emphasis on certain words and syllables. What is the effect of this in poems your learners are studying?
- Remember that variations to rhythms and patterns, when the poet breaks the rules, are often more important than the rules themselves. **Allusions** are the references poets often make to other poems, or to other ideas beyond the poem itself. Exploring language and form helps a deeper understanding of poetic texts.

Visuals	Notes
	Assessment objective 3 requires learners to 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use **language, structure** and **form** to create and shape meanings and effects'. Note the word 'appreciate', which implies critical engagement and evaluation of how the text works. AO3 does *not* ask you to look at language, structure and form in isolation. It is the commentary on **how language contributes to 'meanings and effects**' which counts here. How does the poet's use of language, structure and form lead us towards particular thoughts or feelings? 'Meanings and effects' suggests that there is **more than one meaning** for a text, and the language, structure and form of the poem make that meaning. The word 'effects' does not just mean listing the literary effects which writers use. 'Effects' implies that words have an **effect on the reader,** so AO3 is closely related to **AO4 (personal response)**.
 	Let's look at 'The Caged Skylark' by Gerard Manley Hopkins as an example. The title tells you this poem is about a caged songbird, but this is not to be understood literally. You can't put a skylark in a cage, so this is a **metaphor**, or possibly an **allegory**, for something which is trapped and should be free. This poem needs to be ***heard*** as well as read, as it depends just as much on its music - its various sound effects - as its images or pictures. There are a couple of things to notice. Firstly, the poem is 14 lines long, so it is a **sonnet**, and is divided into eight lines - the octave - and six lines - the sestet. Secondly, there is **rhyme**. Only four rhymes which reinforce that division into **octave** and **sestet**, and make it clear that the poem changes direction after line eight.

Visuals	Notes
	
	There is a lot of **alliteration**. Often more than one word in the same line begins with the same letter and so has a similar sound. When you pay attention to rhymes, sound effects, **line endings** and the stress of the poem, you have its rhythm. As in most poems, **rhythm** is an important part of the effect, which is why it needs to be heard and read aloud.
	It is usually a good idea to consider the **structure** and patterns of a poem **before** writing about its **language**. You need to appreciate this before considering the details of the poem. How does language 'create and shape' a powerful opening here? Notice the contrast between 'dare-gale' which sounds so exciting and 'dull cage'. How does the alliteration reinforce that? What about 'skylark scanted'? What does that suggest has happened to the bird if we imagine it caged? The word 'scanted' suggests something is missing. Notice the difference in rhythm between the first half of the line, and the bare **monosyllables** at the end.

Visuals	Notes
	And what about the word ‘as’? It suggests the whole line is a simile, so we need to look out for a comparison. This tells us the skylark resembles the human spirit. If the human spirit is the skylark, the ‘bone-house’ is the ‘dull cage’.
	Here is another **contrast**, sometimes called a juxtaposition. The spirit is ‘mounting’, so like the bird it wants to climb and soar. A bone-house sounds like a tomb, and a ‘mean house’ like a slum, but in contrast to the spirit, here the poet must be describing the body. Think about the effect of talking about the body in this way. Does it remind us of our own mortality? And what are the things about having a body which can make the spirit mean?
	In Hopkins’ poetry, it isn’t just imagery which makes an impact on the reader. He also uses **rhythm**, based on what we call ‘stress’. In particular, Hopkins used a technique called ‘**sprung rhythm**’. Instead of the iambic rhythms familiar from English poetry such as Shakespeare’s plays, he would put strong stresses together. ‘Th**is** in dr**ud**gery, d**ay**- **la**bouring-out **li**fe’s **a**ge’ When you say this line, you stress the syllables in bold. Notice how the line begins **iambic**, alternating weak and strong stresses, and he then puts **strong stresses** next to each other, by using long vowel sounds (‘a’ and ‘i’) which you have to put an emphasis on. Notice the stress on

Visuals	Notes
	‘day labour’ and ‘life’s age’. Think about what this makes you feel about everyday human life, trapped in the material body instead of in the freedom of the spirit. It provides further illustration of that comparison to a songbird trapped in a cage, and shows how we can sometimes feel trapped in our everyday lives.
	In ‘The Caged Skylark’, Hopkins is clearly not just writing about a bird, but about human feelings. He describes a **spirit** which feels trapped in the material world, and the human body, and wants to be **free** to express itself and find its own ‘wild nest’.
	A very strict verse form – the Petrarchan or Italian **sonnet** originally used for love poetry – may be an appropriate way to express a feeling of being trapped. But look at how Hopkins tries to escape from tight forms by breaking the rules, using alliteration and sprung rhythm, and notice the enjambment (run-on lines) in the final lines and the lack of punctuation. There is a clear change of mood, as well as rhyme in the sestet. This is called a volta or turn, and it is stressed by repeated negation: ‘not’, ‘no rest’, ‘no prison’, ‘not distressed’, ‘nor he’. Finally ‘risen’ is rhymed with ‘no prison’ to suggest an alternative to the images of being trapped or caged yet longing to sing. Freedom and a ‘risen’ spirit are strongly linked. The **allusions** are to nature as well as religion to suggest a spiritual alternative for you, as the reader, to interpret to fit your emotions and beliefs.

Here are some words which you may want to check your understanding of:

	Your notes
metaphor	
allegory	
Sonnet	
Sestet	
tercet	
rhyme	
alliteration	
juxtaposition	
sprung rhythm	
iambic	
allusions	

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2026