

Cambridge IGCSE™ Literature in English 0475

Paper 1 Poetry and Prose – Using candidate responses in the classroom

Songs of Ourselves Volume 2: Writing a response to a poetry question

- The purpose of the response is to make an informed, sensitive (AO4) and supported response to the question that shows a detailed knowledge (AO1) and understanding (AO2) of the poem and a critical engagement with the poet's methods (AO3).
- The candidate will use relevant short quotations from the poem (AO1) as evidence for each point they make.
- The candidate will use the quotations to support a critical response to the poet's methods: the ways in which Awoonor uses language, structure and form (AO3) in making *The Sea Eats the Land at Home* such a moving poem.

Tips for learners

- Read the question and highlight the **key terms** that you need to focus on.
- Read the poem carefully and **highlight relevant parts** that you might use in your answer. Do not highlight too much as you should use short quotations to address precisely the points you make.
- Remember you cannot write about everything in 45 minutes. **Be selective**, but make sure you have comments to make about the beginning and ending of the poem as well as key parts in between.
- Keep **focused on the question**. You are not expected to show everything you know about the poem.
- **Support** your points **with quotations** – the poem is given to you in the paper.
- **Comment precisely** on the ways in which the poet achieves his effects in making this 'such a moving poem'.
- Aim to make at least **10 points** so that you can develop a convincing response to the question.
- Remember that the assessment objectives are not assessed separately, so try to **address all of them in each point** you make.

Examination question

We have annotated the question below with some **guidance** for learners to help them prepare their answer and encourage them to focus on what the question is asking for. This information is not given to candidates in the examination.

The diagram consists of a central text block representing an examination question, surrounded by six orange rounded rectangular boxes containing guidance. Lines connect the boxes to the central text. The central text includes the title 'SONGS OF OURSELVES VOLUME 2, Part 2', instructions to support ideas with details and to read the poem carefully, the poem title 'The Sea Eats the Land at Home', the poem text, an ellipsis, and the question 'How does Awoonor make *The Sea Eats the Land at Home* such a moving poem?'. The guidance boxes provide instructions on identifying key terms, developing critical engagement, understanding key terms, supporting points with quotations, showing context, and managing time.

Once you have read through the question instructions, you will need to identify the **key terms** in the question and which sections of the poem you are going to use.

The purpose of the response is to show that you can develop and sustain a **critical engagement** with both the poem and the question.

The **key terms** of this question are 'How?' and 'such a moving poem'.

SONGS OF OURSELVES VOLUME 2, Part 2

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Read this poem carefully, and then answer the question that follows it:

The Sea Eats the Land at Home
At home the sea is in the town,
Running in and out of the cooking places,
Collecting the firewood from the hearths
...

How does Awoonor make *The Sea Eats the Land at Home* such a moving poem?

You need to support each point you make with a **short quotation** from the poem.

You have **45 minutes** to read the poem and to write your answer: it needs to be long enough and detailed enough to show that you have a clear understanding of the poem and to show a developed critical response to the question.

You need to show briefly that you understand the **context** of the poem: that flooding has caused destruction to people and their homes.

This question is from the Cambridge IGCSE Literature (English) 0486 past paper March 2019 Paper 12 Question 4. For the poem, go to the [School Support Hub](#)

Suggested lesson activities

Assessment objectives

AO1: Show detailed knowledge of the content of literary poetry texts, supported by reference to the text.

AO2: Understand the meanings of literary texts and their contexts, and explore texts beyond surface meanings to show deeper awareness of ideas and attitudes.

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

AO4: Communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to literary texts.

Learning objectives

- To appreciate the importance of focusing on the key words of the question
- To develop confidence in exploring a poem's deeper implications
- To develop the skills of critical analysis

Starter:

Ask learners to consider what makes a good introduction when writing an essay? As a class, collect a list of the top three ideas an introduction should include.

Look at the opening of the candidate response and examiner comments one and two.

As a result of this, ask learners to add to their lists of what an introduction should include.

Development:

Look at the candidate response, examiner comment 14 and the tips for learners. Ask the class to consider what the candidate has done well in the paragraph starting '*Awoonor has also used strong words that add to the moving effect ...*'

Ask your learners to write their own introduction to this essay and then rewrite the paragraph from the candidate response to create an excellent opening. This can be peer marked against the list of tips for learners to ensure that it includes all of the key elements required.

Main task:

Look at the candidate response and examiner comment 17. In the development, learners focused on commenting on language. Look at comment 17 and ask learners how they could develop ideas about the poet's use of structure and consider why this makes the poem moving.

As they did for the starter, learners should consider how to conclude their essay. This can be done as a class activity in which learners share their ideas.

Read the candidate response and examiner comment 18. From this, learners should write their own conclusion to the mini-essay they have built up over the course of the lesson.

Plenary:

Looking at the common mistakes section, learners should comment on their partners mini-essay considering what their partner has achieved and what they might need to improve on.

Example candidate response and examiner comments

Example Candidate Response – high	Examiner comments
<p>The sea eats the land at home is an extremely moving and emotion evoking poem written by Kafi Awoonor. 1 He uses many literary devices such as the personification of the sea which along with its biographical element and repetition 2 of the main idea of the sea eating the land make it an moving poem that remains in readers minds for a long time to come.</p> <p>The atmosphere of the is one of after the passing of a storm and the aftermath that has been left by it. 3 'has lost the trinkets' 'stood outside' 'carried away the fowls' all show the destruction that has been left behind by the sea. 4 However it is the personification of the sea that truly makes this poem moving. The 'sea eats the land' describes it almost as a monster-like figure slowly gradually engulfing the land. 5 This is emphasised by the repetition of the lines 'the sea eats the land at home', 'in the sea that eats the land at home'. 6</p> <p>Furthermore the sea is personified as a person who is 'running in and out of the cooking places', 'collecting' and this personification makes it seem as though it is doing this purposefully. 7 It wants to destroy the 'cement walls' which symbolises safety and home as well as collect the 'firewood from the hearths'. Fire symbolises life, warmth and protection, so the fact that the sea has almost as a thief purposefully taken these raw materials of life such as 'cooking pots and ladles' symbolising food, makes it seem cruel and angry. 8 This is what makes this poem moving that the sea 'came at the dead of night' almost as a thief 9 and took away the poor people's sources of survival.</p> <p>The poet Awoonor also expresses the situation of the people who are at the mercy of the 'angry water'. 10 'sad things to hear the wails', 'mournful shouts' shows that this storm has taken away more than just materials but life as well. 11 Awoonor mentions only women and children which creates deep sympathy in the readers as they are innocent and frail: 'children shivering'</p>	<p>1 A clearly-focused opening sentence that addresses the key word 'moving'.</p> <p>2 The examples of literary devices are picked up later in the essay. There is no need to mention them in the introduction.</p> <p>3 Shows knowledge by establishing the immediate context. (AO1, AO2)</p> <p>4 Uses brief quotations to illustrate the point about destruction. (AO1)</p> <p>5 There is a clear critical understanding of the poet's use of language and an informed personal response: 'describes [the sea] almost as a monster-like figure... gradually engulfing the land'. (AO3, AO4)</p> <p>6 An additional point about the use of repetition. (AO3)</p> <p>7 Further comment: the word 'collecting' suggesting the sea is doing this 'purposefully'. (AO3, AO4)</p> <p>8 This paragraph continues and sustains a sensitive and personal engagement with the detail of the poem. The point made about the symbolism of fire is perceptive. (AO3, AO4)</p> <p>9 There is clear focus on the question's key word 'moving'. (AO1, AO4)</p> <p>10 The focus of this paragraph shifts from the 'cruel' sea to the situation of the people 'at the mercy of the [sea]'. (AO1, AO2)</p> <p>11 Understands the deeper implications suggested by the</p>

Example Candidate Response – high

emphasises this. They are left alone to defend themselves. **12** This loneliness is further carried as their 'gods have deserted her' they are truly alone as even the gods are nothing against the wrath of sea. When we have lost all hope we look to god for comfort and protection, however here the gods have 'neglected her' and even this comfort is lost from the people. **13**

Awoonor has also used strong words that add to the moving effect of the poem 'struggling', 'weeping', 'moans', all add to the helplessness the people feel and strikes the readers. **14** 'Protect them from the angry sea', 'raging', 'cruel' all show the power of the sea and when we compare it to the words mentioned for the people it seems also useless to fight against the sea. They have lost this battle against the sea and this is what makes this poem extremely moving. **15**

The sea has not only taken away the people's livelihood, it has also taken away their future and past, 'it has taken away their belongings'. Everything that is anything to them is gone. The 'cruel sea' has taken it away by the 'bark water at the shore', 'Trinkets' show memories are washed away. The future which we look at in hope when current times are rough is also lost to Adena who has lost her trinkets which were 'her dowry and joy'. The future life, that awaited her has been ended; any hopes for happiness are also gone. **16**

However, the sea and nature do not do things for a reason. They just flow and do what comes naturally to them with no true aim. However, Awoonor very skilfully by giving it personification and using diction, has given it life. This life is a monster who is slowly eating away at all life on land. Repetition plays an important role in this eating effect. The sea starts off with being 'in the town' and then ends as the sea 'eats the whole land at home'. **17** The land has become part of the sea and it has completely taken over. This line echoes in the reader's mind making the poem extremely moving.

Examiner comments

words quoted: 'wails' and 'mournful [actually 'mourning'] shouts'. (AO1, AO2)

12 Recognises effects created by the use of particular words, showing an informed personal response to the reasons the poem is moving: the innocence and frailty of the children are mentioned, and the candidate writes 'They are left alone to defend themselves'. (AO3, AO4).

13 The final two sentences of this paragraph build on the previous comments, showing a perceptive and convincing response to the poem's deeper implications. (AO2, AO4)

14 This sentence is not fully developed. Although the candidate lists several words, it is not clear what 'strong' actually means. Also the link between the quotations and the comment which follows is not made clear.

15 The general points about the power of the sea and the people having lost this battle are linked to the question.

16 This paragraph introduces a new and perceptive idea: 'The sea has not only taken away people's livelihood, it has also taken away their future and past'. This point is well-supported. (AO1, AO4)

17 This paragraph becomes rather general and repeats points made earlier in the answer. The structural point about how the poem starts and ends could be expressed more clearly.

Example Candidate Response – high	Examiner comments
<p><i>The fact that Awoonor has mentioned names adds to the biographical aspect. It seems as if he knows the people and has actually maybe experienced it himself. This is very moving as it is not just someone imagining the event but remembering them with true meaning and pathos. Also it personalises the poem even to one reader. It is not a general poem; it is about the wrath of the sea on a little town and through the names we feel a connection, making this an extremely moving poem. 18</i></p> <p><i>Through the use of personification, diction which aids to the atmosphere and the remembrance of the poem. As well as the repetition of certain lines and phrases, the poet has made this an extremely moving poem.</i></p>	<p>18 This paragraph and the final one are quite general and do not add significantly to the answer. However, this should not detract from the perceptive and sensitive response to the poem and question that forms the major part of this essay.</p>

How the candidate could improve the answer

The candidate makes a perceptive, convincing and sustained response to the ways in which Awoonor makes the poem so moving, addressing the question throughout and exploring precisely the language he uses to achieve his effects.

There are, however, a couple of areas that might have lifted the response **even** higher:

- The introduction and the two final paragraphs contain general points that are repeated in the body of the answer. It would be a more efficient use of time to start and conclude concisely, avoiding any repetition.
- Although there are comments on the title and the use of repetition, the candidate could give more explicit consideration to the overall structure of the poem, for example, the way the focus shifts from the general to the plight of two individual women, Aku and Adena. The candidate does mention them, but possible comment could refer to the way in which Awoonor shifts the focus from the general to the specific.

Common mistakes

The most common mistakes in answering this question are:

- writing general introductions instead of addressing the key words of the question ‘How?’ and ‘moving’ from the start
- working through the whole poem from start to finish instead of selecting the best material to answer the question
- showing a detailed understanding of the poem but not answering the actual question
- writing mainly about the content of the poem rather than the ways in which the poet uses language, structure and form to make the poem ‘such a moving poem’
- making reasonable assertions about the poet’s methods or the poem’s meanings (for example, describing the sea as ‘an invader’ or as ‘heartless’) without providing quotations from the poem to support them
- using lengthy quotations that do not (cannot) lead to precise analysis
- including background material about Awoonor’s life and experiences without making the comments relevant to the detail of the poem.

Examination preparation (advice for learners)

Learners have found some or all of the following advice useful in preparing for poetry questions:

- Annotate copies of your set poems indicating aspects of language, structure and form used to convey ideas or experiences.
- Read the poems aloud regularly.
- Record the poems and listen to them regularly.
- Explore on the internet other readers’ interpretations of the poems.
- Practise combining short quotations and analytical comment in your written responses to poems.
- Mark your own draft answers, finding and editing out:
 - unsupported assertions
 - lengthy quotations
 - irrelevant points that do not address the question
 - irrelevant background material.

Useful resources

- You can find the **syllabus** and the most recent **past papers** at the Cambridge International public website www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/english-literature-0475/
- A list of **endorsed textbooks** and digital resources can be found in the [Resource centre](#)
- The [School Support Hub](#) provides teachers with a wide range of practical resources, detailed guidance and innovative training and professional development so that you can give your learners the best possible preparation for Cambridge IGCSE.
- Look out for the [Introduction to Learner Guides](#) and [Learner Revision Guide](#) videos.

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