

Best Approach to Unseen Poetry GUIDE

- ☐ Golden method for annotating and writing your essay
- ☐ Annotating the poem
- ☐ The full marks essay response

Golden Method for annotating and writing your essay

This method provides a framework to how you should structure your essay that ticks every box in the Assessment Objectives , and consequently how you should annotate the poem

- 1. Beginning** - First portion of your essay discussing the language devices in the first stanza
- 2. Language** - Second portion finding striking language device elsewhere in the poem
- 3. Title** - Third portion of your essay Over-analysing the title, looking at the various connotations and whether this links to what you annotated/observed in the first stanza or whether the title has multiple interpretations
- 4. Form and Structure** - Fourth portion of your essay discussing rhythm, rhyme, juxtaposition, type of poem and how this conforms or subverts to the message of the language devices (there is always some form of transformation or movement in a poem so you need to write about that!)
- 5. Ending** - Final part of your essay analysing the devices used in the final portion of your essay and contrasting that to the part 2 to complete an overall judgement of where the poem has led the reader to.

Note - this method is used in the next top grade example if you want to see it in action!

Going through the Grade 9 Exemplar

TASK: Before you look at my annotations on the next page, try using the 5 step-method to annotate this poem and see what you find!

Poem: "AbraCadabra" by Grace Nichols

Question: "How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about her mother?"
(24 marks)

**unannotated version*

My mother had more magic
in her thumb
than the length and breadth
of any magician

Weaving incredible stories
around the dark-green senna brew
just to make us slake
the ritual Sunday purgative

Knowing how to place a cochineal poultice
on a fevered forehead
Knowing how to measure a bully's symmetry
kneading the narah pains away

Once my baby sister stuffed
a split-pea up her nostril
my mother got a crochet needle
and gently tried to pry it out

We stood around her
like inquisitive gauldings

Suddenly, in surgeon's tone she ordered,
'Pass the black pepper,'
and patted a little
under the dozing nose

My baby sister sneezed.
The rest was history.

STEP 3 - TITLE

Childish, unspecific to a character, title surreal magical and immature connotations contrasts the very real hardships of mothers

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STEP 1 - BEGINNING

Alliteration of the "m" sound - soothing influence of the mother from the onset (birth)

Elongated sounds "length" and "breadth" - vital in poetry, stretches out the mother's capabilities, furthermore sense of exaggeration where reader can infer the speaker is quite young

STEP 2 LANGUAGE

Prominent "Kn" sound - suggesting possibly natural skills of the mother, ANOTHER INTERPRETATION, silent "k" sound highlights how mother's sacrifice and plight is silent and carried out unnoticed :)

Alternative -
Sibilance - uncomfortable sound - highlights the disruption caused by the sister - wider scale indicates how children cause disruption to the lives of mothers due to their overreliance

STEP 4 - FORM AND STRUCTURE

Transition / development of occupations "magician" - mystical , unbelievable
"Surgeon" - more mature and realistic

Both amazing, can appreciate the sense of talent and high skill required for both.
Represents the speaker maturing, and still recognising the enormity of the mothers role

STEP 5 - ENDING

- Breaks the enjambment structure and quatrains into a couplet - what is the significance of this?
- Sense of finality

"st" consonant repetitive sound - end of the flashback

reducing whole childhood down to "history" one word - suggesting that we need to recognise mothers more

The Top-Student Essay - written by Maria - No Waffle GCSE

In the poem "Abracadabra", Nichols explores the almost transcendent and omniscient nature of her mother, as a wider platform to exemplify and celebrate the multi-talented role of mothers.

In the beginning of the poem. The reader gains a sense that the speaker is enamoured and mesmerised by the almost supernaturally depicted powers her mother possesses. In the first line "My mother had more magic" alliteration of the M sound is instrumental in setting a pleasing and soothing tone to the poem. This rhythm could possibly replicate the soothing influence that mothers have through the lens of the speaker and her sister. The speaker then goes to elaborate lengths to capture this awe, that the mother has more magic than the "length and breadth" than any professional magician. The depiction of the extent of the mother's capabilities further ensured with the lengthy assonance stretched sounds of "length" and "breadth" which aid in conveying the extent of the mother's powers and abilities. Within the first stanza, Nichols' use of alliteration and assonance means that much of the meanings are delivered through sound and sensually satisfying to listen to, as the verbal deliverance of the poem would capture this. Through this, Nichols purposefully seems to highlight the astonishment she had felt in her mother's presence, which serves as a greater presence of validating the magical nature of mothers.

The speaker further presents her mother's and all knowing and wise woman through the alliteration the "Knowing" and "Kneading", Two sided as it not only acts to exemplify the multitude of knowledge that mothers possess, but perhaps upon deeper inspection the repetitive use of the silent "K" sound could be felt by the reader as the mother's wisdom and teaching. Nursing and sacrifice is to be carried out silently, without the need for recognition nor congratulation. Nichols could possibly be suggesting that they care. Mothers provide goes unrecognised and the very purpose of the poem is to battle this.

Through the journey of the poem, the poet's standpoint and feelings regarding her mother only seemed to become more mature and self-aware. The progression of the semantic field of occupations surrounding the mother from "Magician" in the first stanza and evolving too "Surgeon" in the penultimate stands. Suggests a transition from something unexplainable and mysterious to something more realistic and measurable. Yet despite this shift in tone through the maturation of the speaker herself. It seems Nichols still comprehends the enormity of a mother's role. Although a

surgeon is more realistic, it still requires patience, extreme skilfulness and wisdom that Nichols seems to suggest all mothers contain. Through this inevitable shift in tone caused by the growing up of the speaker, it separates the immature connotations of the title being "abracadabra" to truly value and respect the scale and sacrifice and patience that mothers continue to carry out.

The final stanza ends the poem and breaks the continuous enjoyment infused form. Into two short sentences. The final line quote. The rest was history. Quote can be inferred to be discussing childhood and solidifies the fact of the speaker reminiscing upon her childhood looking back. The "st" constant sound in the words, rest and history possibly provides a sense of finality to the poem as it evaluates. How the mothers continue to sacrifice and care for their children through their craft, such like a "magician" or a "surgeon" is often hidden and under-appreciated.