



INDEPENDENT
THINKERS COURSES

Advanced Comprehension Skills

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Session Objectives

To understand:

- some key strategies for challenging comprehension papers
- how to tackle English comprehension papers with no mark allocation e.g. SPGS papers
- how to approach character analysis questions
- how to structure longer PQE responses in comprehension exams
- technical components of a sonnet
- first steps in analysing a Shakespearean sonnet.



Where do I start?



- i. Read the passage through once.
- ii. Read the questions once.
- iii. In general, do the questions in the order they are presented on the paper.
- iv. But, if you are stuck or see a question you would rather come back to, do the questions you can answer more easily first.
- v. For each question, go back to the relevant part of the passage, and re-read it BEFORE you write.

Comprehension Tips

- READ each question extremely carefully.
- What EXACTLY are you being asked?
- Ask yourself: how has the examiner helped you answer the question?
- Pick out key words which help you focus on providing an accurate and effective answer.
- Look at the question words and phrases: HOW...? IN WHAT WAYS...? WHAT...? WHEN...? WHAT DO YOU THINK...? WHY...? Each of these words/ phrases is giving you a clue about the sort of answer you need to give.
- Look at how many marks there are for the question (when this information is given).



Warm up question (NLCS 2014 Paper)

3. In the second paragraph, we are told that Tom and Becky wander off from the others. How does the writer communicate their separation from the rest of the party? [2]

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2 marks

The second paragraph

Presently the hide-and-seek frolicking began, and Tom and Becky engaged in it with zeal until the exertion began to grow a little wearisome; then they wondered down a sinuous avenue, holding their candles aloft and reading the tangled webwork of names, dates, post-office addresses, and mottoes with which the rocky walls had been frescoed (in chalk perhaps or elsewhere scratched into the stonework). Still drifting along and talking, they scarcely noticed that they were now in a part of the cave whose walls were not frescoed. They scored their own names into the rock under an overhanging shelf with a jagged piece of stone and moved on.

How has the examiner helped me to answer the question?

- By telling you where to find the answer: the second paragraph.
- What is the key word in this question? Separation.
- This is a 'how' question, so you are going to need QUOTE from the text and analyse your quote.

Presently the hide-and-seek frolicking began, and Tom and Becky engaged in it with zeal until the exertion began to grow a little wearisome, then they wandered down a sinuous avenue, holding their candles aloft and reading the tangled webwork of names, dates, post-office addresses, and mottoes with which the rocky walls had been frescoed (in chalk perhaps or elsewhere scratched into the stonework). Still drifting along and talking, they scarcely noticed that they were now in a part of the cave whose walls were not frescoed. They scored their own names into the rock under an overhanging shelf with a jagged piece of stone and moved on.

Example answer (compressed PEE/ PQE)

The writer shows that Tom and Becky are isolated from their friends by describing them as reaching 'a part of the cave whose walls were not frescoed'. The fact that they are in a part of the caves where no human beings have drawn or painted on the walls conveys Tom and Becky's distance from the other children.



SPGS Sample Paper: H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

9 What kind of person is the narrator? Write a paragraph about him, mentioning three separate things that he says or does and what these tell us about him.

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SPGS English Paper:

How to approach questions with no mark allocation



LOOK FOR CLUES

- How much space to write in is there on the paper?
- Have you been asked to provide a certain number of examples? (In this case, you have been asked for three.)
- What else have you been asked for? (In this case, your view of the narrator's character, plus examples and analysis ('what these tell us about him')).
- Look at the question in relation to the rest of the paper and the time given to complete the whole paper.
- This question is a longer question towards the end of the paper. It is also a question on the passage as a whole. I would recommend spending c. 15 minutes answering it.

Character analysis

- How does the character behave, including towards others?
- How does the character respond to what is happening in the story?
- How does the narrator react to the Martian?
- What does the character say about himself? What is he feeling and thinking?
- What sort of language does he use?
- Look for literary techniques, imagery and striking vocabulary to analyse.
- (What do others say about him?)
- (How does the writer represent the character in dialogue?)

What kind of person is the narrator?

Highly observant and curious:

‘But, looking, I presently saw something stirring within the shadow: greyish billowy movements, one above another, and then two luminous disks - like eyes.’

Passionate; someone who feels strongly and deeply; driven by powerful feelings:

‘I was a battleground of fear and curiosity.’

‘I did not dare to go back towards the pit, but I felt a passionate longing to peer into it.’

Physically courageous, but with a sense of self-preservation:

‘I had a momentary impulse to go back and help him that my fears overruled.’

Example answer (introduction and first PQE(A)/ PEE)

For multiple PQE questions, write an introductory summary sentence:

The passage presents the narrator **as perceptive and fascinated by what he discovers in the world**, highly emotional and – to a large extent – courageous.

P: **The narrator is highly observant and intellectually curious**, especially about the Martian. These qualities are evident in the way he describes the Martian in the second paragraph:

E: 'I presently saw something stirring within the shadow: greyish billowy movements, one above another, and then two luminous disks - like eyes.'

E/ A: The comparison of the Martian's eyes to 'luminous disks' creates a vivid image of the alien, highlighting the narrator's powers of observation, while the phrase 'something stirring within the shadow' creates anticipation, conveys the narrator's sense of excitement at encountering this mysterious creature. This is clearly a man intrigued by the world around him.

William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 29'

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,	A
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,	B
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,	A
And look upon myself and curse my fate,	B
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,	C
<u>Featur'd</u> like him, like him with friends <u>possess'd</u> ,	D
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,	C
With what I most enjoy contented <u>least</u> ;	D
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,	E
Haply I think on thee, and then my state	F
(Like to the lark at break of day arising	E
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,	F
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,	G
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.	G

How to recognise a sonnet

A sonnet is a 14-line lyric poem written in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is a line of verse that consists of five iambs. An iamb comprises one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed, such as the word 'before'.

The Shakespearean sonnet (also known as the English sonnet) comprises three quatrains (groups of four lines) and a final couplet (two lines). It rhymes abab cdcd efef gg.

A sonnet usually contains a turn (Italian 'volta') – a change of mood or perspective. In a Shakespearean sonnet, the turn conventionally comes in the final couplet.

Traditionally, sonnets were love poems. However, since the Renaissance, sonnets have been written about many other subjects: poets have written sonnets on religion, death, war and even on writing sonnets!

Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Reading and responding to poetry

1

Think about form and language as choices made by the poet to achieve specific effects.

2

Look for repetition and patterns, including contrasts.

3

Pay attention to figurative language (metaphors and similes).

4

Look for unusual uses of familiar words, as well as dramatic, powerful and striking vocabulary.

5

Pay attention to syntax, lineation and punctuation.

In your own words...

In your own words, describe the speaker's mood in the first four lines of the poem.

'When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone beweep my outcast state,

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,

And look upon myself and curse my fate,'

Example answer

In the first four lines of the poem, the speaker feels rejected by others, isolated and abandoned. He is also distressed and miserable, crying and complaining about his suffering. Finally, he experiences self-pity and laments the situation in which he finds himself.

NO QUOTES FROM THE TEXT IN 'IN YOUR OWN WORDS' QUESTIONS

MAKE SURE YOU USE SYNONYMS AND DO NOT REPEAT THE WORDS IN THE PASSAGE.

How does Shakespeare present the speaker's change of mood in lines 11-14? In your answer, select two literary techniques and explain their effects.

1. **Simile**/ Metaphor/ personification: '(Like to the lark at break of day arising From **sullen earth**) sings hymns at heaven's gate'

Is there more than one aspect to the comparison?

2. Look for patterns e.g. repetition of 'state'. Why is this noun important in the poem?

Paranomasia/ punning: playing on the different meanings of the same word.

3. Anything **unexpected**? What about the 'turn'? Does it happen earlier than expected?

4. Rhyme scheme: does Shakespeare depart from the regular rhyme for a sonnet?
We could say that this sonnet rhymes ABABCD CD(half-rhyme)EBEBGG.



Our Courses

Advanced English for Years 4-6: Sunday 3rd 10am-11am; Monday 4th October 5.30pm-6.30pm

Advanced English for Years 7-9: Wednesday 6th October 6.15pm-7.15pm and 7.30pm-8.30pm

11+/ 13+ Interview Preparation: fully booked, but please email us to join the waiting list. Next available course is in December.

£95 per month for a weekly class (four hours), includes setting and marking of homework and extension materials.

We will also provide sample answers for the IT Shakespeare paper for new sign ups.

To book, please email: jane.slinn@independent-thinkers.co.uk

Mailing list sign-up for sample answers for NLCS paper and full sample answer for SPGS question.

<https://forms.gle/1kS3VgCJqrsNqMjp7>