

# Consilium Academies

## Unseen Poetry Masterclass Additional Guidance

**How to approach an unseen poem**

**STEP ONE:**  
Read the title – consider meaning.

Look at the shape – is it a particular style (e.g. Sonnet), how many stanzas, line shapes.

Read the poem slowly in your head.

**STEP TWO:**  
After reading, make interpretations to consider:

- Speaker and tone.
- Subject and setting.
- Themes.
- Mood (positive/negative/funny)

**STEP THREE:**  
Re-read closely & annotate:

- Repetition/rhythm/rhyme.
- Poetic devices (simile/metaphor/alliteration).
- Language (word) choices – effects and imagery.

**STEP FOUR:**  
Personal response – what is your personal opinion of the poem, its message and effectiveness?

### Step One:

Read the title and consider the meaning, does it link to the theme of the question?

What does the poem look like on the page? For example, is it a Sonnet (14 lines)? How many stanzas are there? How many lines are there? How does think link to the theme of the question? Can you make it link?

Read the poem slowly to yourself.

### Step Two:

Start to make interpretations that link to the theme of the question. Who is the speaker? What is the tone? What is the setting? Always come back to how it links to the theme of the question.

### Step Three:

Read the poem again. Remind yourself again of the theme of the poem and annotate for poetic techniques. Repetition, rhythm, rhyme, simile, metaphor, alliteration, adjectives, nouns, verbs, enjambment, etc. Always link back to the theme and say how it effects the reader. What does it make them think? What does it make them feel? What does it make them imagine (visualise)?

### Step Four:

What is your personal response about how the poem connects to the theme? Write a brief plan in your exam paper about how you will respond to the question.

## Grade 5 Response to 'Names' by Wendy Cope

In Wendy Cope's poem 'Names', she explores the power of names and how they shape our lives as we grow older. As we journey through the poem, we encounter a woman called Eliza whose identity evolves with each name she carries as she grows old.

The title of the poem 'Names', suggests that a person has multiple names in a lifetime. The poem shows a list of names: 'Eliza Lily', 'Lil', 'Miss Steward', 'Mother', and 'now she was Nanna'. Each name represents a different phase of her life, it could make the reader imagine the woman in the poem is changing costumes in a play and each name fits the specific role she must play. The structure of the poem is chronological, mirroring the content which follows the life story of Eliza, the woman.

These names aren't just labels; they hold memories, emotions, and expectations. The repetition of 'she was' emphasising how her identity changes, or perhaps how it shifts over time as she grows older. It could make the reader imagine that Eliza is trying on different roles during her life, each one revealing a new aspect of who she is.

Cope's choice of words is deliberate. When Eliza returns to work as Mrs Hand after being widowed, we see her resilience. Her daughter's marriage and motherhood further shape her identity as Nanna. These transitions mirror the stages of life we all experience.

But there's an important moment in 'the geriatric ward'. The patients are called by their Christian names, yet Eliza's preferred names 'Lil we said, or Nanna' are missing. She becomes Eliza once again, perhaps longing for the simplicity of her original name in her old age.

As a reader, I feel a mix of empathy and recognition. We all carry multiple names, some official, some intimate, and each name tells a story. Maybe you've been a student, a friend, a sibling, or a dreamer. Each role adds layers to your identity. The poem reminds us that our identities are constantly shifting as we grow older.

## Grade 7 Response to "Names" by Wendy Cope

In Wendy Cope's poignant poem 'Names', she delves into the profound impact of names on our lives, especially as we grow older. Through the lens of a woman's evolving identities, Cope invites us to consider the complexities of human existence and growing old.

The poem begins with a litany of names: 'Eliza Lily', 'Lil', 'Miss Steward', 'Mother', and 'now she was Nanna'. Each name represents a distinct chapter in the woman's life, akin to turning pages in a well-worn book. These names aren't mere labels; they carry memories, emotions, and expectations.

Cope's choice of words is deliberate. The repetition of 'she was' underscores the fluidity of identity, how it shifts like tides over time. Imagine being called by different names at different life stages: student, friend, parent, grandparent. Each name adds layers to our sense of self. The use of 'was' suggests that Eliza is no longer these things to these people, which adds a melancholy sadness to the poem.

As we journey through the poem, we encounter pivotal moments. When the woman becomes Mrs Hand after being widowed, we witness her resilience. Her daughter's marriage and her role as Nanna further shapes her identity. These transitions mirror the seasons of life, spring to summer, autumn to winter, which further links to the life stages of a human, with the winter being the end of life.

But there's a bittersweet twist in the geriatric ward. The patients are addressed by their Christian names, yet the woman's preferred names, 'Lil we said, or Nanna' are absent. She reverts to Eliza, perhaps yearning for the simplicity of her original name.

The structure of the poem is chronological, mirroring the content which follows the life story of Eliza. The lack of rhyme or rhythm pattern mirrors the lack of order in the memories that Eliza shares with the people on the ward; thus deepening our sense of the confusion of the woman and increasing our sympathy for her dementia-state. In addition, the poet's use of caesuras such as ' Eliza Lily, Soon it changed to Lil' create a further sense of confusion, disconnection and flow, giving the reader a similar experience to the experience of Eliza. The poet binds us together by disjointed, un-flowing memories, which makes the reader feel great sadness for Eliza.

## Grade 9 Response to 'Names' by Wendy Cope

Wendy Cope presents great sympathy towards Eliza in the poem 'Names'. Through the mere exploration of the names one woman takes on in her lifetime, Cope is able to explore identity, particularly that of women, and express sympathy towards all women. She is also able to explore the cruelty of dementia and how identity and relationships can all be lost in the 'bewildered weeks' at the end of life. In both interpretations, Eliza is a target for great sympathy.

The choice of the title 'Names' immediately indicates to the reader that the poet is exploring identity. By using the voice of the granddaughter (possibly autobiographically), which is clear in the line "'Lil' we said 'or Nanna'" the poet is able to create a deeper connection between the speaker and Eliza. The sympathy is deepened in knowing that the loss of the Eliza is a personal loss for the speaker. The idea that the woman, Eliza, returns to the name she was given as a baby could indicate the return of her to her baby state in more than just name. It could symbolise that mentally, through dementia, she has returned to a baby-like state. The reference to the 'last bewildered weeks' strengthens this interpretation. The use of the adjective 'bewildered' emphasises the confusion for Eliza and increases our sympathy for her. By adding the adjective 'last' we are also conscious that she is at the end of her life, and so softened more towards sympathy to begin with.

The structure of the poem is chronological, mirroring the content which follows the life story of Eliza. The lack of rhyme or rhythm pattern mirrors the lack of order in the memories that Eliza shares with the people on the ward; thus, deepening our sense of the confusion of the woman and increasing our sympathy for her dementia-state. In addition, the poet's use of caesuras such as ' Eliza Lily, Soon it changed to Lil' create a further sense of confusion, disconnection and flow, giving the reader a similar experience to the experience of Eliza. The poet binds us together through the use of disjointed, un-flowing memories.

Another aspect of the poem that arguably draws our sympathy is the exploration of female identity. The great number of different names the woman has in her life represents the great number of roles she undertakes. She is not simply Eliza, nor even 'Lil', she is also identified purely by her marital status, 'Miss Steward'. 'Mrs Hand', or her position as a nurturer, 'Mother' 'Nanna'. The fact that all the 'Names' referred to in the title, apart from Eliza, Eliza Lily, Lil are defined through relationship to men and children could, perhaps, be an indictment on the treatment of women in society. Cope could be asking the reader to sympathise with Eliza, and symbolically all women, due to the hijacking of their individual identities for the sake of their husband's and children.