

What is Most Important?

When you're in an exam, having to assemble your ideas about a poem or poems, it is very easy to latch onto small things that aren't very important and spend a lot of time on them, while ignoring some really big, important, interesting points. Selecting *significant* features of a single poem, or significant points of similarity and difference if you're comparing poems, is a very important skill.

Here is a poem, followed by a list of ten points that you might want to make about it.

- In small groups, decide which five points you want to keep and which five you would discard on the basis of which you think are most significant. In deciding which are significant, you will need to talk about the possible impact of each feature described and its connection to the meaning you take from the poem.

Intimates

Don't you care for my love? she said bitterly.

I handed her the mirror, and said:

Please address these questions to the proper person!

Please make all requests to head-quarters!

In all matters of emotional importance

please approach the supreme authority direct! -

So I handed her the mirror.

And she would have broken it over my head,

but she caught sight of her own reflection

and that held her spellbound for two seconds

while I fled.

DH Lawrence

Points for discussion

- a. There is alliteration in the word 'Please' and the phrase 'proper person'.
 - b. The poem starts straight in with a rather brusque question, using the word 'Don't'.
 - c. The reply of the speaker is absurdly formal and sarcastic.
 - d. The poem ends with a surprise.
 - e. The word 'mirror' is repeated twice.
 - f. There's a strong pattern in the poem of words like 'So', 'and', 'but' and 'while'.
 - g. There's a lack of comment to direct us what to think, with only quoted conversation and actions, the poem ending on the actions.
 - h. The title is a really interesting one.
 - i. 'Said', 'head' and 'fled' rhyme.
 - j. There's a strong contrast between words that seem official and formal in the second stanza and more personal, simple, everyday language in the rest of the poem.
- Now as a whole class, share what people in your group considered to be most significant. Decide whether any that have been chosen don't really justify their place. (There should be some strong debate about this. Agreement on the significance of a particular feature will depend on how convincingly you relate that feature to the meanings in the poem and its impact.)
 - Pick one of the points that you have all agreed to be significant and, on your own, write a short paragraph explaining what impact that feature has and why it is important in terms of the poem.