

Chapter 2: Studied written text – Poetry texts

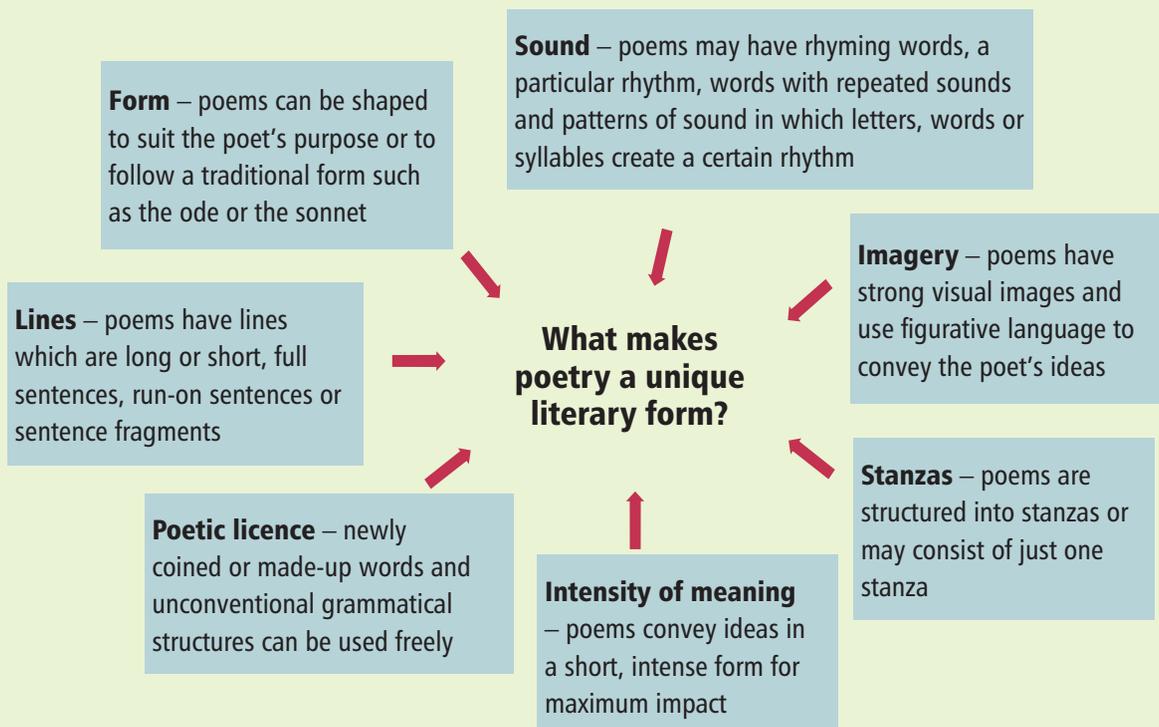
The focus for studied written texts in this section is on poetry. Refer to page 1 for achievement criteria.

What is poetry?

‘Prose: words in their best order. Poetry: the best words in their best order.’

– Samuel Taylor Coleridge

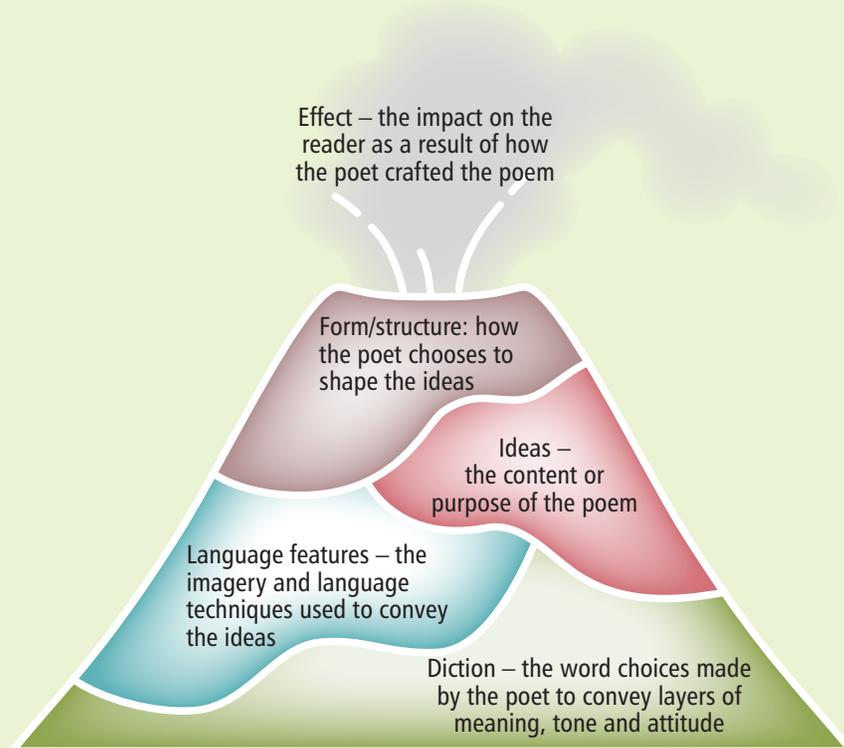
Poetry is distinguished from prose in that it can do without conventional grammatical constructions and can play fast and loose with the meanings of words. As a result of this freedom, poetry is capable of opening in its readers a fresh sense of the world. It is at once the most exhilarating and exciting literary form and the most challenging and frustrating. It takes time and effort to reveal the riches in good poetry – but the effort is always worthwhile. Poetry is a unique text form that expresses experiences, feelings, ideas and thoughts, to comment on the world around us. Poets create vivid images of situations, relationships and events that are often the common experiences of many people. Using patterns of words, poets give a personal view of what they have seen, thought, heard or felt, and in doing so capture a feeling, mood or atmosphere. Words and images often need to be understood fully and interpreted before the poet’s message is made clear.



Studying poetry

Studying a poem for Level 2 English requires an in-depth analysis of a poem's key components, beyond the surface meaning. Your approach needs to be much more scientific than the one you may have used for Level 1 English to 'describe and explain' poetic ideas and language. The language of poetry, unlike other literary forms, conveys its message within the confines of a small space, so its language is much more dense and economical than that of prose. Every word is carefully chosen and made to work hard, with many words using more than one level of meaning.

The layers of meaning in a poem can be viewed like the layers of a volcano. The impact on the reader as understanding is experienced can be compared to an explosion of lava from the volcano. There are five key areas to analyse in the poetry 'volcano':



Poetry journal

As part of a poetry study, you should read and respond to as many poems as possible, including the ones discussed in this section, ones you study in class and those you encounter when working on your other achievement standards. Think of your poetry journal as a tool that will help you express your own views and first impressions, as well as helping you contribute to class discussions. Write your notes as if you will be telling a classmate about the poems. The effort you make now will have a really positive spin-off when you write an essay in the exam that includes your own original insights.

Reading poetry should be done actively, not passively. Analysing a poem can be like unravelling a complicated knot – you pick at one strand after another until you find one that loosens and releases part of the tangle, then another and another. Eventually, your effort is rewarded – by full understanding of how the poem works and what it means. Be alert to the ideas and feelings, scenes and sensations that the writer wishes to share. You will understand and enjoy some poems on your first reading of them, but others will only come into focus after repeated readings, close examination, thought and discussion. It is important to record your own initial responses before engaging further with the poem in class. You will have studied poetry in the past, so call on all your prior knowledge to help you.

Task 2.1: Reading and annotating poems

Use a 1B5 or similar exercise book as your poetry journal.

1. Glue copies of each poem in the middle of a journal page, leaving a broad margin on both sides of the poem.
2. Draw or glue in pictures and images that relate to each poem. Label the images with words from the poem.
3. Read each poem aloud before you write any responses.
4. Respond by annotating the poem in the margins.

Annotation guide

Follow the steps in the guide below for each poem in your journal. Use a highlighter to locate words and phrases. Use arrows to write a relevant but brief comment next to the words and phrases in the margins you have left on either side of the poem.

Step One – What is the poem about?

Read the poem aloud at least twice. Then read it through silently at least once.

Jot down next to the title what you think the title means in relation to the poem.

Write one sentence across the top of the poem that sums up what the poet is discussing.

Who is talking or narrating? Is the poem addressed to the reader or to someone else?

Step Two – How does the poet present the ideas?

As you focus on what is said and how it is said, consider vocabulary, structure and imagery.

Vocabulary

Has the poet used ordinary everyday words in new and unusual senses and combinations? If so, what is the effect?

Are there any words and phrases that are unusual or striking? If so, what is the effect?

Are there any groups of words or phrases that give a special tone and extra sense to the poem (such as religious terms, jargon or frequent references to a specific idea)? If so, what is the effect?

What words or phrases are especially important to the poem? Are any repeated or echoed? If so, what is the effect?

Structure

Is the poem written in a traditional form, such as an ode, sonnet or elegy?

How is the poem structured using line divisions and punctuation, sentence structure and word order (such as enjambment, inversions, parentheses, etc.)?

How has the poet linked ideas, objects or thoughts using the structure? Does the ending of the poem provide a summary or conclusion?

Is there any connection between the content of the poem and the shape of the lines on the page? If so, what is the connection?

Imagery

Identify any visual imagery used in the poem, such as metaphors, personification and similes. For each one, write a brief note on its use and effect.

Identify any sound imagery used in the poem, such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia. For each one, write a brief note on its use and effect.

Do the images form distinct groups or occur more than once? If so, what is the effect?

Student example

Strong, declarative statement showing reverence and admiration of the view.

The diction here links to the noun 'soul' and to how the sight before him moves him so profoundly.

His reverence for London is shown in the use of a capital letter and the personification of the city as royalty wearing the beauty of the morning light like a cloak.

The sestet opens with another strong declarative statement. Its syntax is similar to that of the opening line, reinforcing how the dawn light soaks into the natural surroundings as beautifully as it did at the dawn of time – 'first splendour'.

Reference to soul – the spirit that moves the poet to admire this amazing sight.

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by

A sight so touching in its majesty:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. 4 8

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will: 11

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still. 14

A calm mood is created by the use of the adjectives 'silent' and 'bare', as well as by the slow listing of the buildings that 'lie open' to nature, represented by the fields below and sky above: an all-encompassing world spirit.

The repetition of 'Ne'er / never' shows the depth of the poet's admiration and reverence, as well as a sense of intense calmness and peace.

The sense of quiet is enhanced by the personification of the houses as being asleep and the way the people inside are referred to as the houses' 'mighty heart': the essence of the 'animus mundi' which still lies quiet and still in the early morning.

The poet's reverence for God as the creator of all that the poet sees before him is shown by the use of the adjective 'Dear' and the exclamation mark.

The soft sibilance of the 's' sounds in the sestet reinforces the sense of peace and calm, as do the soft 'l' and 'th' sounds.



An exemplar essay about the poem, 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' by William Wordsworth

Topic: Analyse the ways in which a writer has responded to an important idea in a text you have studied.

The following paragraphs have been written on this topic, based on one poem, using the previous notes and annotations. The paragraphs focus on aspects of tone and structure in the poem.

In the Petrarchan sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' by William Wordsworth, Wordsworth shares a moment of quiet contemplation, looking over London while standing on the bridge as dawn approaches, to arrive at a profound truth about the world spirit in creation. This belief in a world spirit, or 'animus mundi', was typical of the Romantic Movement at the time and with it came a heightened awareness of the human spirit, and a renewed reverence for nature.

Reference to poet's response/thesis statement.

Understanding of literary context and reference to nature.

The reverent tone and the mood of contemplation Wordsworth creates are expressions of his own feelings of awe about nature and the view, expressed through the powerful simplicity of the language and the slow rhythms of the poem. The strong, declarative opening statement (line 1) shows the poet's immediate feelings of reverence and admiration of the view, while the reference to 'soul' (line 2) conveys the spirit that moves him to admire this amazing sight. The diction here links to the noun 'soul', showing how profoundly the sight moves him. His reverence for London is also shown in the use of a capital letter for the word 'City' and the personification of the city as royalty wearing the beauty of the morning light like a cloak (lines 4–5). A calm mood is created using the adjectives 'silent' and 'bare', as well as through the slow listing of the buildings that 'lie open' to nature, represented by the fields below and sky above (lines 6–7). This shows the poet's belief in and reverence for an all-encompassing world spirit.

Immediate focus on tone to indicate poet's response/attitude/link to thesis statement.

Range of details and techniques discussed on aspects of nature.

The poem is structured so that the sestet opens (line 9) with another strong declarative statement with a similar syntax to that of the opening line, reinforcing how the dawn light soaks into the natural surroundings as beautifully as it did at the dawn of time, as we see in the biblical allusion to the 'first splendour' (line 10) when God created the world. The repetition of 'Never' (line 11) shows the depth of Wordsworth's admiration and reverence, as well as a sense of intense calmness and peace. The soft sibilance of the 's' sounds, found throughout the poem, emphasises the sense of peace and calm, as do the soft 'l' and 'th' sounds. The poet's reverence for God as the creator of nature and all that the poet sees before him is shown also by the use of the adjective 'Dear' and the exclamation mark (line 13). The sense of quiet is enhanced by the personification of the houses in the closing lines as being asleep and the way the people inside are referred to as the 'mighty heart' which is the essence of the 'animus mundi' lying quiet and still in the early morning (lines 13–14). Readers respond to the deep-felt emotion in the poem and can appreciate the experience of nature and creation that the poet has shared with them.

Focus on the poem's structure and related poetic techniques throughout paragraph.

Comment on sound devices is essential.

Good tie-back and focus on the readers' response.

Analysing poetry

The rest of this section will provide you with notes, activities and guidance to add to your poetry journal.

Content and purpose

The content of a poem is what the poem focuses on – the events, scenes, descriptions, characters presented. This is also known as the subject matter of a poem. The content includes what the poem is about and what the poet is saying, which is the purpose of the poem.

Example

In 'No Ordinary Sun', Hone Tuwhare reflects on the impact of nuclear fall-out on nature by personifying a tree that has been destroyed, just as humans are in the explosion, which is compared to a 'bright enhaloed cloud'. The poet's purpose is to persuade us that nuclear warfare will destroy all life in its path as shown when he addresses the tree with the words 'your sap shall not rise again' and by implication, we realise we should avoid such warfare at all costs.

No Ordinary Sun

By Hone Tuwhare

Tree let your arms fall:

raise them not sharply in supplication
to the bright enhaloed cloud.

Let your arms lack toughness and
resilience for this is no mere axe **5**
to blunt nor fire to smother.

Your sap shall not rise again
to the moon's pull.

No more incline a deferential head to the wind's talk, or stir
to the tickle of coursing rain. **10**

Your former shagginess shall not be
wreathed with the delightful flight
of birds nor shield
nor cool the ardour of unheeding
lovers from the monstrous sun. **15**

Tree let your naked arms fall
nor extend vain entreaties to the radiant ball.

This is no gallant monsoon's flash,
no dashing trade wind's blast.
The fading green of your magic **20**
emanations shall not make pure again
these polluted skies ... for this
is no ordinary sun.

O tree
in the shadowless mountains **25**
the white plains and
the drab sea floor
your end at last is written

Task 2.4: Content and purpose

Answers
p. 303

An expression of strong emotion is found in the response to the effects of the devastating Christchurch earthquake on 22 February 2011 by Dr Jeffrey Paparoa Holman in his poem 'after the tremor', published on his blog page dated 9 March 2011.

Write a short paragraph based on 'after the tremor' by Jeffrey Paparoa Holman, in which you discuss the main idea and the poet's purpose. You should comment on what the poet is saying and how he expresses the main idea by linking it to the title. Quote evidence for your thinking. Use your prior knowledge of the event to help you engage on a personal level.

after the tremor

by Jeffrey Paparoa Holman

Paragraph

after the tremor the neighbour

after the terror the stranger

after the stranger the doctor

after the doctor the soldier

after the soldier the looter

after the looter the vulture

5

after the horror the ruins

after the ruins the kindness

after the kindness the sirens

after the sirens the silence

after the silence the weeping

after the weeping the comfort

10

after the toppling the creaking

after the shaking the shaking

after the shaking the questions

after the questions the questions

after the rage and courage

after profound desolation

after the nurse and the undertaker

we stand and we drink from a glass of water

15

20

Theme

The theme of a poem is found in the idea or message the poet shares through the content. The content of a poem may focus on a funeral and detail the weather, people's reactions and the burial site; the theme may be dealing with grief.

Example

In the poem 'No Ordinary Sun' on page 40, one of the main themes is the destructive effects of a nuclear bomb blast on nature, showing how horrifying the impact might be on a tree and, by implication, on all forms of life.

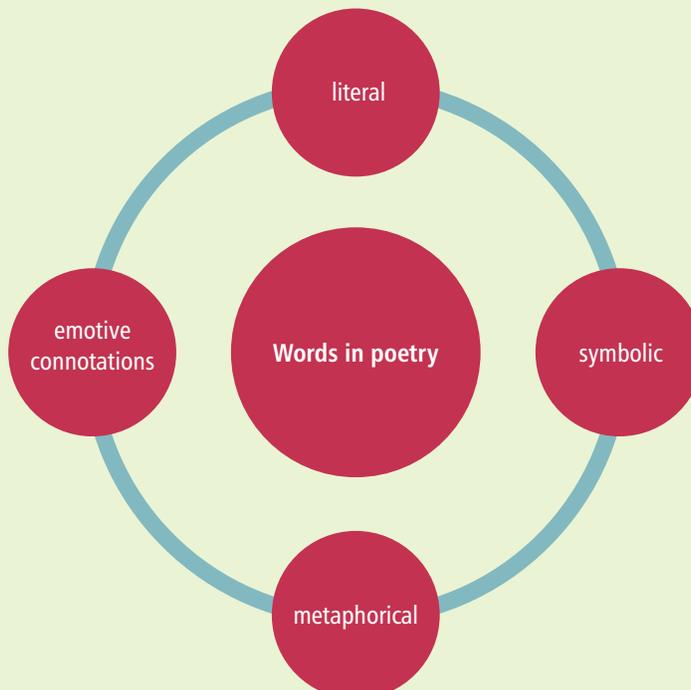
Task 2.5: Theme

Answers
p. 303

Think about why Jeffrey Paparoa Holman chose to write the poem 'after the tremor'. What is the poet trying to communicate through the images he creates?

Diction

Poets choose each word in a poem very thoughtfully. Because meaning in poetry may be presented in linked layers, the reader must carefully search for all the possibilities of meaning contained within a word or phrase in order to respond fully to the poem. Most poetry is lyrical, meaning that poems are concerned with describing thoughts and emotions.



ANSWERS

Chapter 1: Studied written text – Prose texts

Task 1.5: Characterisation (page 13)

1. Full name – Zachary Lincoln Taylor; shown singing, dancing; in military; friendly; responsible – cleaning up the mess from the brood frames; physical description of broad shoulders, a narrow waist, short-cropped hair, black, handsome.
2. Light-hearted, caught in a funny moment of dancing to ‘Viva Las Vegas’ when he thought he was alone; an all-American good guy, enjoying iconic American pop-culture; patriotic, named after not just Zachary Taylor, but Lincoln as well; outgoing, relaxed – ‘Yeah, so I’ve heard’; served country in the military.
3. Lily prefaces her description with ‘He was not what I expected’. Then she comments later, ‘I was shocked over him being handsome.’ This shows that Lily’s own assumptions and expectations were flawed, and based on prejudice. The description of Zach is that he is seemingly perfect, yet she had expected otherwise. Lily is quick though to acknowledge ‘how wrong we’d all been’, as she is rapidly becoming aware of her own racist attitudes.

Task 1.9: Symbolism (page 21)

- a. Religious destruction; religious hatred; fear; danger.
- b. Loss of vitality; approaching death; vulnerability.
- c. Violence; hatred; abuse; evil.
- d. Cleansing; baptism; renewal.
- e. Power; evasion; cunning; manipulation.

Chapter 2: Studied written texts – Poetry texts

Task 2.4: Content and purpose (page 41)

Holman expresses his immediate response to the earthquake by listing both the devastation and the feelings experienced after the earthquake. The repetition of ‘After’, which is also in the title of the poem, reinforces the multitude of mixed emotions and events that occurred immediately after the earthquake happened, such as the terrible ruins and weeping. However, the poet alternates the negative aspects with the positive ones, including the kindness and comfort offered to the victims, to show that the disaster also brought out the best in people.

Task 2.5: Theme (page 42)

Holman shows that though there is a chain of unusual events after the earthquake, at some point people do stop to enjoy a very simple act of survival and appreciate the moment, as shown in the concluding line: ‘we stand and we drink from a glass of water’.

Task 2.6: Diction (page 43)

- a. ‘supplication’: as if the tree is raising up its branches to beg, but in vain.
- b. ‘sap shall not rise’: the fertility of the tree will be destroyed forever, with no hope of survival or reproduction.
- c. ‘monstrous sun’: the nuclear explosion is a destructive force that burns and destroys.

Task 2.7: Form (page 45)

1. The poet shows how the earthquake has affected other creatures, such as the fly buzzing around him, by structuring the poem into two stanzas of unequal line lengths without any punctuation to reflect the fly’s continuous circular flight pattern. He ends with an ironic punchline that emphasises the advantage of the earthquake to a small, insignificant creature such as the fly.
2. Writing from the first-person perspective, the poet focuses on how the fly might view the earthquake positively as ‘a business opportunity’ because of the available decayed matter, instead of focusing on the ‘human disaster’.

Task 2.8: Bringing it all together (page 46)

1. a. offence, failure, defect, lack, a leak in an electrical current, a disturbance of the earth’s crust causing a break in the continuity of the rock masses, being in the wrong, causing a problem, being to blame.
b. mistake, error, penalty, defect, blame, weakness, break down, discontinuity, displacement, vice.
- 2.

Words that describe a fault	Everyday activities
A defect, a small disappointment. (line 4)	A summer day / laden with ... (lines 4–6)
Someone to blame. (line 7)	A sparrow / rests lightly on the hand of a statue. (lines 7–8)
A weakness ... communications break down. (lines 8–9)	A telephone rings into silence. (line 10)
dis-/continuity, lateral displacement (lines 10–11)	A woman / leaves a café, checks both ways, crosses the street. (lines 11–12)
An unthought response. A vice. (line 13)	Students / repeating the phrases – Good Morning ... (lines 13–14)

3. a. Hyphenating *dis-/continuity* highlights how the earth cracked and broke as the earthquake occurred, causing a lack of continuity in the earth’s surface. Hyphenating *Good/-bye* emphasises that the word is cut off to show that people did not have a chance to say a full goodbye because the earthquake struck so suddenly.
b. Enjambment.
4. The caesuras (full-stops) within lines, alternated with the enjambment, create an irregular, shuddering rhythm reminiscent of an earthquake. Frequent use of sibilance (the alliterative ‘s’ sound) in the poem creates a hushed mood to emphasise the quietness before the earthquake struck.
5. By structuring the poem in this manner, the poet shows that people were going about their business as normal on this quiet summer’s day of the earthquake and could not anticipate the terrible events which were about to unfold like a list of faults when the earthquake struck at ‘twelve fifty-one’.

Chapter 3: Studied written texts – Drama texts

Students' individual answers.

Chapter 4: Close reading of unfamiliar texts

Task 4.1: Analysing purpose and audience (1) (page 82)

1. People with prior knowledge of advanced technology who regularly use devices. References are made to websites like YouTube and TVNZ OnDemand, and terms such as 'smartphones', 'tablets' and 'apps' are used without the need to explain what they mean.
2. The author's purpose is to inform readers about the latest developments and advancements in technology. The word 'Driving' creates a feeling of energy and things moving forward at a fast pace and the imperative 'Think' pulls the reader into the topic.
3. Jargon is used because the article has been written for readers already in the know, so the readers do not require explanations for the processes of advanced technology. This effectively targets the audience who would be interested in 'the greater availability' of such services.

Task 4.2: Analysing purpose and audience (2) (page 83)

1. People interested in sport, particularly those who follow Rugby League. The writer refers to 'Bulldogs', 'State of Origin' and 'Roosters' without explaining who or what they are.
2. The writer informs the reader about a conflict – 'the latest tug-of-war' – in an NZRL campaign to stop New Zealand players who live in Australia from playing in the State of Origin.
3. These phrases are known as clichés, which are a shortcut used to provide a familiar image or idea for the reader while keeping the tone light by avoiding the need for too much 'wordiness'.

Task 4.3: Analysing purpose and audience (3) (page 83)

1. Adults. The brevity of the comment shows no expectation that the reader will disagree or be offended by it.
2. The writer has a low opinion of the film; she gives it a one-star 'abysmal' and does not go into any discussion of it.
3. 'Never': repetition to emphasise how much she dislikes the film; 'We': inclusive personal pronoun to emphasise that the expectation is that all readers would agree with her; the writer also uses a pun on the title of the movie to address Justin Bieber directly.

Task 4.4: Connotations – mood (page 84)

- a. Mood: ominous, fearful, anxious
Words: dark, narrow, relentlessly
- b. Mood: dangerous, powerful, stormy
Words: thundered, jagged, unforgiving
- c. Mood: inviting, enticing
Words: delicious aromas floated

Task 4.5: Connotations – descriptions (page 85)

- a. walk: move one's way forward on foot
stroll: to walk in a relaxed, casual manner
stride: to walk fast and with purpose
- b. fat: over the accepted norm for weight
voluptuous: having a full and curvaceous figure
obese: excessively fat
- c. cry: make a sound to express grief, pain or distress
wail: make excessively loud sounds to express grief, pain or distress
sniffle: make very small, soft sounds to express grief, pain or distress
- d. ugly: unpleasant to the eye, ear or mind
homely: plain or unattractive to the eye
repulsive: disgusting or loathsome

Task 4.6: Denotations and connotations (page 85)

1.

Word	Denotation	Positive connotations	Negative connotations
green	a colour	youthfulness, environment, freshness	immaturity, envy, sickness
rough	uneven level/ bumpy surface/ coarse texture	an approximation of something	unpleasant, unfair, lacking taste, crude
guts	intestines	instinct, courage, hard working	greed, dislike
moon	satellite that orbits earth monthly, reflecting light	romance, desire, beauty, time	madness, lunacy, aloofness, silliness
dog	four-legged animal similar to a wolf, often kept as a pet	courage, tenacity, loyalty	aggressiveness, ugliness, overly competitive

2. Denotations of words: All the words relate to the physical world of theatre with a stage on which actors exit and enter to perform a role in a play.
Connotations of words: That in life, all people play different roles at different ages, from their entrance to the world at birth, to their exit at death.

Task 4.7: Vocabulary (page 86)

Possible answers are as follows:

Vocabulary technique 1: Imagery

Writer's purpose and meaning: The writer conveys a sense of loss through the simile 'pastry that flaked and fell like lightly singed paper onto grey Formica' – by evoking a hint of destruction and fragility in using the word 'singed', then back to the Formica reality.

Vocabulary technique 2: Diction/Connotations

Writer's purpose and meaning: The writer suggests Pete's methodical attention to detail through the compound adjective 'boy-scout knots' and the adjective 'an extra half-hour securing the suitcases', and reflects the sense of this being an out-of-the-ordinary event. The writer's use of antonyms highlights the contrast between Gail's feelings and Pete's; the closer they get to Dunedin and separating from their son, the more her anxiety increases – 'foreboding' and 'gloomier' while Pete feels 'happier'.

Vocabulary technique 3: Listing

Writer's purpose and meaning: The writer conveys aspects of Andrew's character effectively in a few small details that show how important it is to him to take his guitars and amplifier with him.

Task 4.8: Analysing tone (page 88)

Extract 1: Poetry

- a. Narrator's attitude: The narrator is in shock and feels dismayed at the suddenness of the earthquake.
- b. Tone: The tone is one of fear and alarm.
Evidence: 'We are aghast' and 'flying/clutching/scrabbling/calling'.
- c. Technique: Diction/connotations – the adjective 'aghast' describes the strength of their alarm; sudden and anxious movements are described in the verbs (participles).

Extract 2: Non-fiction

- a. Narrator's attitude: The narrator feels a strong sense of despair about the ongoing lack of facilities after the earthquake.
- b. Tone: The tone is gloomy and negative.
Evidence: 'awful/isolated/abandoned/tough/miserable/' and 'I hated it'.