

Main Points

Here are some tips to help you write good main points in your exam essays. When writing a main point you should:

- Refer clearly to the question, often at the start
- Follow the PEE structure
- Use more than one piece of evidence to support the point made
- Consider a variety of literary features
- Smoothly embed quotations in the sentences
- Spend time on the explanation, really examine the effect of things

The following example main points were written in response to the question 'Compare the way that Seamus Heaney conveys the experience of childhood trauma in 'The Barn' and another poem of your choice.'

Example 1:

The poet is able to effectively convey the reader that the persona is feeling trapped and cornered with 'no windows' and only 'one door' to the barn. The persona describes the 'farmyard implements' as 'an armory' which have threatening and war-like connotations and by comparing the 'threshed corn' to 'grit of ivory' or 'solid as cement', Heaney suggests that the persona views the corn as a precious object. This cause the reader to feel that the corn must mean more than food, and was valuable to the persona, or his family. The phrase 'grit of ivory' however is ambiguous and hence could also imply that, to the person, the 'threshed corn' was no longer alive and familiar, but in an unnatural state. Additionally, referring to the corn as 'solid as cement', further depicts that the persona realizes that perhaps the corn is not as it may first have been seen but is instead alienated and even threatening.

Comment [K1]: Good word that shows evaluation and not just analysis – necessary for the A* grade

Comment [K2]: Smooth use of quotations

Comment [K3]: Good detailed explanation

Comment [K4]: Alternative readings of this phrase are considered

Comment [K5]: Good clear explanations

Example 2:

The structures of the poems serve to show the ordeals of the personas. In Mid Term Break, the regular three lines per verse creates a sense that the child is trying to make order out of this tragic experience. Enjambment creates a more disjointed, irregular rhythm, ultimately showing the internal turmoil he is going through and the awkwardness he feels. The tone is sombre and emotion builds up throughout. The odd breaks in a line suggest a break-through of emotion, which may symbolise his recognition of this brother's death. Moreover, the last line, 'A four foot box, a foot for every year,' is separated from the other stanzas in the poem, therefore having a greater impact on the reader, emphasizing the tragedy of both the situation and the feelings of the persona and implying that his attempt to impose order on what happened eventually fails. In contrast 'The Barn' has a regular four lines per stanza structure written in iambic pentameter. There is also occasional rhyme in most verses, which may show the childishness of the persona. Additionally, throughout the poem, Heaney uses the word 'you' inviting the reader to share the persona's trauma and making it seem more personal for the reader. Finally, both enjambment and punctuation disrupt the flow of the poem suggesting fear.

Comment [K6]: Good attempt to analyse one of the more complex literary features – notice that the poems are being compared right from the start

Comment [K7]: Nice complex point

Comment [K8]: Specific lit feature identified and a complex effect is clearly explained

Comment [K9]: Again – a nice subtle literary feature is identified. Although a quotation as evidence would be good

Comment [K10]: Once again a complex point is considered here

Comment [K11]: Clear comparison

Comment [K12]: Nice technical term and a clear effect is identified

Comment [K13]: A nice concise point, although again a quotation would have been good

Example 3:

Heaney's 'The Barn' also conveys images of war and death in the words 'armour' and 'shot' additionally reinforcing the child-like image of war, thus creating an impression of childhood trauma. Heaney's use of how 'the musty dark hoarded an armory' personifies the darkness and creates the impression of a malicious presence, storing threatening objects rather than 'farmyard implements' indicating that the 'implements' are no longer tools, they are more alienated and have transformed into something more like implements of torture heightening the impression of childhood fear.

Comment [K14]: Precise quotations

Comment [K15]: Clear relation to the question

Comment [K16]: Nice literary feature identified

Comment [K17]: Good detailed explanation of this point