

BBC Bitesize - Poetry

Episode 2 – Quotations in poetry

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TESTAMENT: Word up, welcome to the Bitesize Poetry Podcast. My name's Testament, I'm a rapper, writer and poet. And in this series, I'm going to give you loads of tips to help you write about poetry in your GCSE English Literature exam. This episode is all about how to use quotes because this is so important, you have to use quotes, fam.

TESTAMENT: I am joined by the amazing poet Caroline Bird, hello.

CAROLINE: Hello.

TESTAMENT: What tips have you got to help us to remember quotes?

CAROLINE: The way I do it is I say them over and over again. I mean that might sound obvious, but I say them whilst brushing my teeth, I say them whilst walking down the road in time to my own footsteps. Sometimes I'll write them out. The only way to do it is to make sure that your mouth knows it, not just your brain right? And if there's something strange about the quote, try and relate to it personally. It's really hard to remember a quote if it means nothing to you.

TESTAMENT: And often I use like sticky notes as well or I write them down, I might stick it in my bedroom somewhere. Get my loved ones to test me, come on mum test me on this.

CAROLINE: You can sing it.

TESTAMENT: Oh yeah, oh gosh the number of songs I've made up to remember a quote for an exam in my life, it's crazy. Don't worry no one has to hear you singing it, but you can make up your own little melody.

CAROLINE: Yeah.

TESTAMENT: If you're looking at a poem and you want to pick a good quote to remember in your exam, I'd go for a quote that does more than one thing. So, something where you can write loads about it, the imagery, perhaps the tone, the perspective. So right now, I'm sat in a studio with Caroline and she's wearing the most amazing green shoes. They're green brogues, so I'm free styling here.

Caroline wore shoes as green as the first flush of spring. [C: Okay, right okay] It's a pretty bad line but, it does loads.

CAROLINE: So okay right okay, let's roll with it. So, if you give me, Caroline wore shoes as green as the first flush of spring right. [T: Yeah.] So, to begin with if I was gonna write about that you might go okay, well this sounds like definitely a compliment. And this flurry of words that green as the first flush of spring, it –

TESTAMENT: First flush ooh alliteration [C: First flush right.] that's emphasis, isn't it?

CAROLINE: But then I'd think, well it's also quite over the top, isn't it? And maybe I'd write about the exaggeration of the speaker, and why is the speaker so obsessed with this person and their shoes, right? That's interesting.

TESTAMENT: The good thing is there's no wrong answers because I obviously meant it, it's like spring is a place of growth and new life and great things. So, I'm thinking oh wherever Caroline goes she's bringing new good and positive vibes and positive energy.

CAROLINE: Exactly.

TESTAMENT: And but we can both, using it, you're saying it's too much it's hyperbole, we're exaggerating it. And I'm saying no it's a compliment and my deep emotions of how inspired I am by your poetry knowledge. So there, with one bit of imagery you've got a little bit of alliteration, first flush, that's right that's quite cool.

You've got, as green as, so this is a simile. And the reason the poet here, me, muggins here, is using that is to try and demonstrate something. And it's using nature imagery, what does nature mean to us in this context?

CAROLINE: And you've got intimacy, because you're not saying, Caroline Bird's shoes, you're saying Caroline's shoes. So, you're implying that the reader knows me, you know? Which creates a closeness with the reader.

TESTAMENT: Sometimes it's hard to remember massive quotes. So even if you just remember, okay first flush or, just spring even. It's like oh the speaker of the poem compared Caroline's shoes to spring. That's valid as well. If there's multiple uses for the quotes that's better. So, for poems about nature, great, and we can use, talk about how spring is, refers to nature and it's positive or negative. Or if it's about relationships then it's like okay well that's great. We've got nature and relationships, and it can be used for multiple uses.

TESTAMENT: First and last lines often make great quotes. Why do they make great quotes?

CAROLINE: Cos this is where we meet the poem, and it's where we leave the poem, right. And it tells us the first impression, and it also tells us yeah the emotional gesture that happens at the end. Think like if you were performing this poem would people be crying, would they be clapping, would they be looking at you in weird silence? You know, what is what has it made you feel right at the end?

TESTAMENT: Even in stories, I mean to use once upon a time as an example, so once upon a time tells us loads about a story, okay. It happened a long time ago, did it really happen, it sounds like a fairy tale. And at the end they lived happily ever after, let's say. Again, it's like, well it's leaving us with a different tone again, you know.

CAROLINE: Remember that a poem doesn't always end with an answer. [T: That's right.] A poem can end with a question, or something that creates a mystery.

TESTAMENT: Totally, if it said, they all fell in a big hole, and they lived happily ever after, you might question oh is that ending actually ambiguous. Actually, it hasn't got a set meaning. It's making you, leaving you with a mystery.

CAROLINE: Quite like that line.

TESTAMENT: I'm off to the hole now.

TESTAMENT: It's useful to listen to the rest of this series, even if it's not poems you're studying. You can hear how we talk about quotes and why we pick them, and it will help you spot good quotes in your poems. So, let's sum everything up. You need to back up your answers with quotes, and you need to pick a useful quote. What's a useful quote?

CAROLINE: Well, a useful quote is something that means the most to you. So, when you're reading the poem, what are your favourite lines? What are the ones that you can picture the clearest in your head? What are the ones that sound interesting to you? The best way to memorise a poem and get involved in a poem is to have skin in the game. So, you've got to think, if you make it mean something to you, you will care about knowing bits. It's like caring as a type of exam strategy.

TESTAMENT: Yeah, and once you've found that quote that you want to use, write down all the different ways you can use it, and different ways you can analyse it. So that could be tense, it could be imagery, it could be which poetic device is it using, is it simile, is it a metaphor, is it personification? What does it mean for the story of the poem? Is this the part of the poem where ooh the baddie's turned to a goodie or something's changed in the emotion or the tone of the poem.

Have a write down of all the different ways in which you can use that quote to back up your ideas. So Caroline, do you find it easier to remember a longer quote, maybe a whole line, or maybe even two lines, rather than short ones?

CAROLINE: I think memorising a longer quote yeah it's easier to feel emotionally connected to it.

TESTAMENT: Um hm, if you can't remember a whole line don't worry. A quote can be just a word, so pick the most important word or words, and focus on remembering those. Let's go through tips for remembering quotes one more time.

CAROLINE: Okay. Say it over and over and over. Say it whilst you're brushing your teeth. Say it in time to your footsteps. You don't have to say it in like a posh "poemy" voice, right? You can turn it into a song. You can say it in, you know, weird voices. You know, you can say it over and over, so your mouth knows it.

TESTAMENT: Wicked.

TESTAMENT: Thank you for listening to this Bitesize Poetry Podcast. Thank you to my guest Caroline Bird. Caroline is staying with me because in the next episode we are talking about unseen poetry, so meet us over there when you're ready. And there's loads more Bitesize revision podcasts, check them out on BBC Sounds. Peace.