

Subsequent questions and discussion

The two minutes or so that you will spend answering questions after the oral commentary should be looked at positively. It is less a case of your teacher trying to catch you out, and more an opportunity for you to develop the points you made earlier. Remember, however, that this is still part of your formal commentary and will contribute to the way that you are assessed, so avoid answering the questions superficially. It may be that your teacher comes back to the guiding questions during this interaction, so make sure that you have at least considered them beforehand.

Here are some of the types of question or challenge that you might find yourself answering:

- Explain what you meant by something that was said earlier.
- Give an example of something that you said in the commentary.
- Consider a theme you did not discuss in your commentary.
- How do you interpret the author's choice of technique?
- Relate the themes or characters in the extract to the work as a whole.
- Say something general and philosophical about the poem or extract, such as why the work is important to study in the context of today's world, and what it is saying about the human condition.

Subsequent questions and discussion of literature for HL

If you are in the HL, then you will spend an extra ten minutes discussing one of the remaining Part 2 texts that you studied with your teacher. The discussion is an opportunity for you to show your knowledge, understanding, appreciation and analysis of the work. Try to give generous, rounded and detailed answers to the questions, and avoid one-worded, undeveloped and flat responses. Below are examples of the kind of responses that are good and those that are poor:

A lively, interactive discussion about a novel	A poor and undeveloped discussion on a collection of poems
<p>Teacher: Tell me about the way that power is discussed in the novel that you studied.</p> <p>Student: Power in this work is an important theme and essentially plays itself out in two fundamental ways. First, there is the power struggle between the protagonist and the antagonist formed on the sexual politics that define their relationship. The protagonist tries to affirm himself in the community by establishing the laws in the market place, but he is seduced by the antagonist, who uses her sexuality to manipulate him into making the wrong strategic decisions [student gives examples]. Second, we have the power struggle between the village and the outside mercantile forces represented by the company that wants to buy the rainforest, which is their livelihood. This power struggle is primarily financial and can be best seen in the symbol of the tractor, which is first introduced as something positive for the community's farming but rapidly becomes an ominous signifier of destruction and industrialization</p>	<p>Teacher: What do you feel the poet is saying about religion?</p> <p>Student: That religion is bad.</p> <p>Teacher: Could you explain?</p> <p>Student: He is saying that religion is for the common people.</p> <p>Teacher: Interesting, what exactly do you mean by that?</p> <p>Student: Religion is not for the top people in society, it's for the bottom people.</p> <p>Teacher: What do you mean by bottom people?</p> <p>Student: The common people.</p> <p>Teacher: And they are?</p> <p>Student: Um, the ones who don't really like ... the ones that are not on top in the way they think. It's difficult to explain.</p>

[student gives examples]. In both cases we see a public appearance of dominance by the protagonist and the community, but behind the scenes in both cases more subtle forces are at work that underscore this appearance.

Teacher: Interesting, so it's about appearances and reality as well then.

Student: Yes, that's right, not unlike the play we studied and to a certain extent some of the poems that we discussed in our lessons. We have seen the theme of appearances and reality repeat itself. The difference in the novel that we studied is that appearances tend to be communal, but reality seems to be an individual phenomenon: it is hidden in the recesses of bedrooms, courtyards and chambers.

Teacher: Can you think of any examples?

Student: Yes, for example ... [continues with a number of examples elaborating on the literary features and how they are used in the descriptions of these places and interactions].

Teacher: And how does the poet do this?

Student: By saying things about religion in his poems.

Teacher: Sorry, what I meant was which techniques does he use to communicate this to the reader, this idea of religion being the opiate of the masses?

Student: Lots of literary features in his poetry, like imagery.

Teacher: Could you give some examples?

Student: Umm ...

Teacher: For instance in poem X, there's the image of the fountain in the village square ...

Student: Yes.

Teacher: How does that bring across this idea of religion being a type of drug for the inhabitants?

Student: Umm ... it's imagery of religion being like a drug for the people.

Teacher: What do the children of the village do with the fountain?

Student: I can't remember.

Teacher: They play in it all day long, remember?

Student: Oh yes.

Teacher: And what do you think this symbolic activity is suggesting about our approach to spirituality?

Student: That we play with it.

Teacher: Okay, any other ideas?

Student: Umm ... no, that's all.

Teacher: Remember that the children muddy the water through this activity so in the end the town people cannot drink from it any more.

Student: Yes.

Teacher: So this might be saying that the source of potential life for the village is wasted by a superficial usage of it.

Student: I guess so.