

AQA Love and Relationships

Revision and Comparison Booklet

Year 11 English Literature

15 poems Key ideas Methods Context Comparisons Essay planning

This booklet supports revision of the complete AQA Love and Relationships cluster. It does not replace the official anthology: use your school copy when reading and annotating each full poem.

How to use this booklet

For each poem, learn the central argument first. Then select a small number of flexible quotations and practise connecting the poem to at least two useful comparison partners. In the examination, the quality of the comparison matters more than the number of quotations remembered.

The AQA comparison task

- One named anthology poem will be printed in the examination paper.
- You must compare it with one other poem from the Love and Relationships cluster.
- You should address ideas, methods and relevant context across both poems.
- Plan a clear argument before writing. Compare throughout rather than writing two separate mini-essays.

A useful SQL paragraph

S	Statement: make a comparative point that answers the question.
Q	Quotation: embed short, precise evidence from both poems.
I	Inference and ideas: explain what the evidence suggests about the theme or relationship.
L	Language and links: analyse the writer's method, explain its effect and link to context or intention where relevant.

Before you write

- Underline the exact focus of the question.
- Write a one-sentence thesis explaining the main similarity or difference.
- Choose the comparison poem because it gives you a strong argument, not merely because both poems share a broad theme.
- Select two or three methods from each poem that directly support your argument.

Cluster at a glance

Poem	Relationship focus	Dominant mood	Strong starting comparison
When We Two Parted	Former lovers	Secretive and mournful	Neutral Tones
Love's Philosophy	Unreturned desire	Playful and persuasive	Sonnet 29
Porphyria's Lover	Possessive lovers	Calm but disturbing	The Farmer's Bride
Sonnet 29	Absent lovers	Passionate and urgent	Love's Philosophy
Neutral Tones	Former lovers	Bleak and bitter	When We Two Parted
Letters from Yorkshire	Distant companions	Reflective and warm	Sonnet 29
The Farmer's Bride	Unequal marriage	Fearful and tense	Porphyria's Lover
Walking Away	Parent and child	Tender and reflective	Mother, any distance
Eden Rock	Child and parents	Peaceful and ambiguous	Before You Were Mine
Follower	Son and father	Admiring then uneasy	Walking Away
Mother, any distance	Mother and adult child	Attached but uncertain	Walking Away
Before You Were Mine	Daughter and mother	Affectionate and possessive	Eden Rock
Winter Swans	Long-term couple	Tense then hopeful	Neutral Tones
Singh Song!	Newly married couple	Joyful and rebellious	Winter Swans
Climbing My Grandfather	Grandchild and grandfather	Trusting and admiring	Follower

1 When We Two Parted

Lord Byron 1788–1824

What happens? The speaker remembers a secret relationship that ended painfully. Years later, hearing the former lover's name revives his grief, shame and sense of betrayal.

Main themes: Separation; secrecy; betrayal; lasting grief; forbidden love; memory.

Context: Published in 1816. Byron's public reputation and complicated private relationships may inform the poem, but the speaker's feelings should remain the main focus.

Form and structure: Four regular eight-line stanzas and a strong ABAB rhyme pattern suggest a memory repeatedly revisited. The final lines return to "silence and tears", creating circularity.

Methods worth analysing

- Cold imagery makes the separation feel lifeless and final.
- Repetition and circularity show that the grief has not ended.
- Silence and secrecy create isolation and shame.
- Changes in time connect the original farewell with continuing pain.

Short quotations to learn

"In silence and tears"	"Pale grew thy cheek and cold"
"Long, long shall I rue thee"	"How should I greet thee? — / With silence and tears"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Neutral Tones for a damaged relationship; Winter Swans for a contrasting response to conflict; Porphyria's Lover for secrecy and control.

Possible thesis

Byron presents separation as a private wound that time cannot heal; the poem's return to silence suggests the speaker remains trapped in the original loss.

Your revision notes

2 Love's Philosophy

Percy Bysshe Shelley 1792–1822

What happens? A persuasive speaker argues that everything in nature joins with something else, so the person addressed should return his love and kiss him.

Main themes: Romantic desire; persuasion; unity; nature; unrequited love; physical intimacy.

Context: Shelley was a Romantic poet. Romantic writing often values emotion, individual freedom and the power of nature.

Form and structure: Two balanced eight-line stanzas build a tightly controlled argument. Each develops examples from nature and ends with a rhetorical question, placing pressure on the listener.

Methods worth analysing

- Personification makes nature appear loving and purposeful.
- A semantic field of union supports the speaker's argument.
- Religious language makes physical love seem natural or sacred.
- Rhetorical questions reveal persuasion but may also suggest entitlement.

Short quotations to learn

"The fountains mingle with the river"	"Nothing in the world is single"
"And the sunlight clasps the earth"	"what are all these kissings worth"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Sonnet 29 for desire expressed through nature; Winter Swans for natural imagery and union; Porphyria's Lover for a more troubling attempt to possess love.

Possible thesis

Shelley presents desire as an irresistible law of nature, although the speaker's carefully constructed argument can also seem pressuring and self-serving.

Your revision notes

3 Porphyria's Lover

Robert Browning 1812–1889

What happens? A dramatic monologue in which a speaker describes strangling Porphyria at the moment he believes her love belongs completely to him, then sitting beside her body.

Main themes: Possession; control; obsession; violence; power; distorted love; gender.

Context: Published in 1836. Victorian expectations around gender, sexuality and social position are relevant, but the speaker's abnormal psychology is central.

Form and structure: A 60-line dramatic monologue exposes the speaker's unreliable mind. Its single continuous stanza and recurring ABABB rhyme pattern create disturbing control despite the violent event.

Methods worth analysing

- The storm reflects tension before Porphyria enters.
- Porphyria initially appears active while the speaker is passive; the power balance then reverses.
- The speaker uses calm, logical language to rationalise murder.
- Religious reference at the end reveals his certainty and moral blindness.

Short quotations to learn

"The rain set early in to-night"	"That moment she was mine, mine"
"Three times her little throat around"	"And yet God has not said a word!"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: The Farmer's Bride for male control and female silence; When We Two Parted for secret love; Neutral Tones for destructive relationships.

Possible thesis

Browning presents possessive love as a form of domination: the speaker preserves a perfect moment only by destroying Porphyria's life and voice.

Your revision notes

4 Sonnet 29 I think of thee

Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1806–1861

What happens? The speaker's thoughts of her absent lover grow like tangled vines around a tree until she asks him to return in person and renew her joy.

Main themes: Longing; absence; passionate love; imagination; nature; emotional dependence.

Context: Barrett Browning wrote a sequence of sonnets associated with her love for Robert Browning. Her relationship developed despite her father's opposition.

Form and structure: A 14-line Petrarchan sonnet traditionally associated with love. The volta beginning "Yet" shifts from tangled thoughts to a direct appeal for the real lover's presence.

Methods worth analysing

- The extended tree and vine metaphor shows thoughts becoming abundant but restrictive.
- Imperatives make the appeal passionate and urgent.
- Sensory natural imagery makes love feel alive.
- The ending values physical presence over imagined love.

Short quotations to learn

"I think of thee!"	"my thoughts do twine and bud"
"Renew thy presence"	"I do not think of thee — I am too near thee"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Love's Philosophy for romantic desire and nature; Letters from Yorkshire for connection across distance; Winter Swans for physical closeness.

Possible thesis

Barrett Browning celebrates intense love but shows that imagination cannot replace genuine human presence; fulfilment comes through closeness rather than fantasy.

Your revision notes

5 Neutral Tones

Thomas Hardy 1840–1928

What happens? The speaker recalls the bleak setting and painful final moments of a relationship, using the memory as a lasting lesson about the deceptive nature of love.

Main themes: Loss; bitterness; memory; disillusionment; emotional distance; failed love.

Context: Written in 1867. Hardy's poetry often questions romantic ideals and presents human happiness as vulnerable to time and circumstance.

Form and structure: Four regular quatrains contain the memory. The final stanza returns to the sun, tree, pond and grey leaves from the opening, creating a cyclical structure.

Methods worth analysing

- Drained colours create lifelessness and emotional emptiness.
- Pathetic fallacy makes the landscape reflect the relationship.
- The lover's smile appears false and ominous.
- The final generalisation shows one experience shaping the speaker's view of all love.

Short quotations to learn

"We stood by a pond that winter day"	"The sun was white, as though chidden of God"
"The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing"	"keen lessons that love deceives"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: When We Two Parted for lasting pain; Winter Swans for a winter setting but possible reconciliation; The Farmer's Bride for emotional distance.

Possible thesis

Hardy presents failed love as a memory that contaminates both the landscape and the speaker's future understanding of relationships.

Your revision notes

6 Letters from Yorkshire

Maura Dooley born 1957

What happens? A city-based speaker reflects on letters from someone living a practical rural life. Their different worlds remain connected through language, memory and affection.

Main themes: Distance; communication; companionship; nature; contrasting lives; emotional connection.

Context: A contemporary poem. Its precise relationship is left open, allowing it to be read as romantic love, friendship or another close bond.

Form and structure: Five free-verse tercets move between the correspondent's physical rural work and the speaker's urban life before ending with their connection across distance.

Methods worth analysing

- Tactile rural imagery contrasts with abstract city news.
- Second-person address creates intimacy.
- Questions reveal uncertainty about what counts as meaningful work.
- The final communication metaphor suggests closeness despite distance.

Short quotations to learn

"In February, digging his garden"	"It's not romance, simply how things are"
"pouring air and light into an envelope"	"our souls tap out messages across the icy miles"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Sonnet 29 for longing across distance; Mother, any distance for connection despite separation; Walking Away for bonds stretched by physical distance.

Possible thesis

Dooley presents communication as a bridge between contrasting lives, suggesting that emotional intimacy can survive geographical and social distance.

Your revision notes

7 The Farmer's Bride

Charlotte Mew 1869–1928

What happens? A farmer describes his young wife's fear of him and of other people. He and the community pursue and confine her, while he ends by expressing frustrated physical desire.

Main themes: Patriarchy; isolation; coercion; unfulfilled desire; fear; marriage; control.

Context: An early twentieth-century poem reflecting unequal marital power and limited female autonomy in a rural society. The wife is never allowed to narrate her own experience.

Form and structure: A dramatic monologue gives the farmer control of the story. Six irregular stanzas, shifting line lengths and rhyme create an unsettled voice that becomes fragmented at the end.

Methods worth analysing

- Animal imagery reveals how the community dehumanises the bride.
- Collective pronouns show communal involvement in controlling her.
- Seasonal change suggests time passing without emotional progress.
- The fragmented ending exposes the farmer's escalating desire and loss of control.

Short quotations to learn

"More like a little frightened fay"	"We chased her, flying like a hare"
"We caught her, fetched her home at last"	"The brown of her — her eyes, her hair, her hair!"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Porphyria's Lover for male possession; Climbing My Grandfather for contrasting uses of extended metaphor and touch; Neutral Tones for emotional disconnection.

Possible thesis

Mew exposes a marriage governed by male entitlement: although the farmer presents himself as lonely, his language reveals the fear and confinement imposed on his wife.

Your revision notes

8 Walking Away

Cecil Day-Lewis 1904–1972

What happens? A parent remembers watching his child drift away after a first football match and move towards school. The memory leads him to recognise that genuine parental love requires allowing independence.

Main themes: Parental love; separation; growing up; memory; independence; letting go.

Context: Written about the poet's son. The poem looks back across many years, showing that a seemingly ordinary childhood moment retains emotional significance.

Form and structure: Four regular five-line stanzas mirror thoughtful reflection. The argument develops from vivid memory and images of drifting away to a mature conclusion about love.

Methods worth analysing

- The visual memory of the child moving away becomes symbolic.
- A satellite simile conveys painful separation from a secure orbit.
- Natural imagery makes independence part of growth.
- The final paradox defines love through restraint rather than possession.

Short quotations to learn

"It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day"	"Like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit"
"selfhood begins with a walking away"	"love is proved in the letting go"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Mother, any distance for parent-child separation; Follower for changing family roles; Before You Were Mine for retrospective family love.

Possible thesis

Day Lewis presents separation as painful but necessary, arguing that selfless parental love enables rather than prevents a child's independence.

Your revision notes

9 Eden Rock

Charles Causley 1917–2003

What happens? The speaker imagines or remembers his parents waiting across a river in an idealised landscape and senses that they are inviting him to join them.

Main themes: Parents; memory; death; afterlife; childhood; reunion; idealisation.

Context: Causley's parents had died when the poem was published. "Eden" evokes the biblical paradise, supporting an interpretation of the setting as an afterlife.

Form and structure: Four controlled quatrains present precise memories, followed by a three-line invitation to cross the stream. The final isolated line creates an ambiguous revelation.

Methods worth analysing

- Specific domestic details make the parents vivid and familiar.
- Pale light and the river create a boundary between worlds.
- The parents appear younger, suggesting idealised memory.
- The understated final line makes the anticipated crossing both peaceful and unsettling.

Short quotations to learn

"They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock"	"My father, twenty-five"
"They beckon to me from the other bank"	"I had not thought that it would be like this"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Before You Were Mine for imagining parents before the child; Walking Away for parent-child separation; Follower for memory and changing family relationships.

Possible thesis

Causley presents family love as enduring beyond death, transforming memory into a calm but ambiguous vision of reunion.

Your revision notes

10 Follower

Seamus Heaney 1939–2013

What happens? The speaker remembers admiring his father's skill while ploughing and recalls following awkwardly behind him. In the present, their dependence has reversed.

Main themes: Admiration; parent-child relationships; ageing; memory; role reversal; identity.

Context: Heaney grew up on a farm in Northern Ireland. Rural labour is both a literal memory and a measure of the father's strength and expertise.

Form and structure: Six regular four-line stanzas reflect the father's control and skill. The final stanza shifts abruptly into the present and overturns the earlier relationship.

Methods worth analysing

- Extended sailing imagery makes the father powerful and graceful.
- Technical farming vocabulary conveys expertise.
- The child's stumbling contrasts with the father's precision.
- The final reversal introduces frustration, guilt and the effects of ageing.

Short quotations to learn

"His shoulders globed like a full sail strung"	"An expert"
"I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake"	"It is my father who keeps stumbling / Behind me"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Walking Away for parental memory and independence; Before You Were Mine for viewing a parent across time; Climbing My Grandfather for admiration of an older male relative.

Possible thesis

Heaney presents childhood admiration with warmth, but the final role reversal complicates love with responsibility, impatience and awareness of ageing.

Your revision notes

11 Mother, any distance

Simon Armitage born 1963

What happens? A mother helps her adult child measure a new home. The physical tape measure becomes a metaphor for their bond as the child moves towards independence.

Main themes: Parent-child love; independence; attachment; transition; risk; separation.

Context: A contemporary poem about leaving home. Its ordinary domestic task becomes an exploration of emotional dependence and freedom.

Form and structure: The 15-line poem resembles a sonnet but extends beyond its conventional 14 lines. The final line therefore enacts movement into independence.

Methods worth analysing

- The tape measure is an extended metaphor for connection.
- Spatial imagery turns the house into a stage of growing independence.
- “Anchor” and “Kite” compress competing needs for security and freedom.
- The unresolved final alternative captures both possibility and fear.

Short quotations to learn

“Mother, any distance greater than a single span”	“You at the zero-end, me with the spool”
“Anchor. Kite.”	“to fall or fly”

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Walking Away for letting a child go; Letters from Yorkshire for bonds across distance; Follower for changing parent-child roles.

Possible thesis

Armitage presents independence as a tense negotiation: the parental bond remains essential even as the child tests how far it can stretch.

Your revision notes

12 Before You Were Mine

Carol Ann Duffy born 1955

What happens? The speaker imagines her mother's glamorous life before motherhood and reflects affectionately, but also possessively, on how having a child changed it.

Main themes: Maternal love; memory; identity; youth; sacrifice; possessiveness; time.

Context: The poem draws on family photographs and imagined memories. Its title reverses the expected parent-child possession, implying the child claims the mother.

Form and structure: Four five-line stanzas move non-chronologically between the mother's youth and the speaker's childhood, imitating memory. The title phrase recurs as a refrain.

Methods worth analysing

- Direct address creates intimacy across time.
- Cinematic and dance imagery makes the mother's youth vivid.
- The repeated title phrase sounds loving but possessive.
- References to Marilyn Monroe suggest glamour and social expectations surrounding women.

Short quotations to learn

"I'm ten years away from the corner you laugh on"	"shriek at the pavement"
"The decade ahead of my loud, possessive yell"	"you sparkle and waltz and laugh"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Eden Rock for reconstructing younger parents; Follower for admiration and memory; Walking Away for the complexity of parent-child love.

Possible thesis

Duffy celebrates her mother's independent identity while acknowledging that a child's love can be possessive and can reshape a parent's life.

Your revision notes

13 Winter Swans

Owen Sheers born 1974

What happens? A couple walk beside a lake after conflict. Watching swans move together helps them reconnect physically and emotionally.

Main themes: Reconciliation; lasting love; conflict; communication; nature; unity.

Context: A contemporary relationship poem. Swans traditionally symbolise lifelong partnership, but the poem earns its hopeful ending through tension rather than sentimentality.

Form and structure: Six tercets create a repeated sense of space and separation, while the final couplet visually brings the pair together. Enjambment mirrors continuing movement.

Methods worth analysing

- Post-storm weather reflects a relationship after conflict.
- The couple initially walk apart and avoid direct communication.
- Swans provide a natural model of partnership.
- Hand imagery turns an awkward touch into renewed unity.

Short quotations to learn

"The clouds had given their all"	"silent and apart"
"They mate for life"	"like a pair of wings settling after flight"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Neutral Tones for contrasting presentations of a winter relationship; Love's Philosophy for nature and union; When We Two Parted for a contrasting outcome to conflict.

Possible thesis

Sheers presents reconciliation as quiet and tentative: shared attention to nature allows physical contact to express what the couple cannot yet say.

Your revision notes

14 Singh Song!

Daljit Nagra born 1966

What happens? A newly married shopkeeper neglects customers and family expectations because he is absorbed in his lively, unconventional relationship with his wife.

Main themes: Married love; cultural identity; family expectations; rebellion; joy; partnership.

Context: Nagra explores British Punjabi identity and generational tension. The poem's stylised voice celebrates linguistic creativity; it should not be treated as simply incorrect English.

Form and structure: A dramatic monologue mixes song-like refrains, dialogue and changing stanza patterns. The energetic form reflects the couple's playful relationship.

Methods worth analysing

- Phonetic voice creates an individual, performative speaker.
- Repetition and refrain make the relationship joyful and musical.
- Customers and the father represent commercial and family expectations.
- Romantic imagery transforms the ordinary shop into a private world.

Short quotations to learn

"my bride"	"vee share in chapatti"
"my newly bride"	"Is priceless baby"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Winter Swans for partnership; Love's Philosophy for physical and playful desire; The Farmer's Bride for a sharply contrasting presentation of marriage.

Possible thesis

Nagra presents married love as exuberant and liberating, allowing the couple to remake cultural, commercial and family expectations on their own terms.

Your revision notes

15 Climbing My Grandfather

Andrew Waterhouse 1958–2001

What happens? The speaker imagines climbing his grandfather's body as though it were a mountain, discovering both his physical features and the emotional security of their relationship.

Main themes: Family love; admiration; memory; exploration; ageing; trust; closeness.

Context: The poem uses an extended metaphor rather than describing a literal climb. Close observation turns the grandfather's ageing body into a valued landscape.

Form and structure: One continuous free-verse stanza mirrors an uninterrupted climb. The journey moves upwards towards the grandfather's face and finally his heart.

Methods worth analysing

- The extended mountain metaphor makes the grandfather seem impressive and enduring.
- Tactile imagery conveys careful, affectionate exploration.
- First-person present tense makes the memory immediate.
- The slow pulse at the end suggests trust, life and emotional closeness.

Short quotations to learn

"I decide to do it free"	"the skin of his finger is smooth and thick"
"watch a pupil slowly open and close"	"knowing the slow pulse of his good heart"

Best comparison routes

Compare with: Follower for admiration of an older male relative; Eden Rock for family memory; Mother, any distance for an extended metaphor expressing a family bond.

Possible thesis

Waterhouse presents family love as an act of patient discovery, transforming the grandfather's ageing body into a landscape of strength, history and safety.

Your revision notes

High value comparison routes

Focus	Pair	Argument to develop
Painful endings	When We Two Parted and Neutral Tones	Both speakers remain shaped by a failed relationship; Byron stresses secrecy and betrayal, while Hardy stresses disillusionment and emotional barrenness.
Possession and control	Porphyria's Lover and The Farmer's Bride	Both expose unequal relationships and silenced women. Browning reveals an individual murderer's logic; Mew also exposes communal and marital power.
Desire and nature	Love's Philosophy and Sonnet 29	Both use natural imagery to express desire. Shelley turns nature into a persuasive argument; Barrett Browning shows thought growing until real presence is needed.
Conflict and reconciliation	Neutral Tones and Winter Swans	Both use bleak winter landscapes. Hardy's relationship remains emotionally dead; Sheers allows nature and touch to reopen connection.
Parents letting go	Walking Away and Mother, any distance	Both use spatial separation to explore independence. Day-Lewis looks back with acceptance; Armitage captures the uncertainty while separation is happening.
Admiring family members	Follower and Climbing My Grandfather	Both present older male relatives through physical imagery. Heaney introduces role reversal and ageing; Waterhouse ends with closeness and security.
Parents across time	Eden Rock and Before You Were Mine	Both recreate parents as younger people. Causley imagines reunion beyond death; Duffy explores the mother's identity before motherhood.
Marriage	Singh Song! and The Farmer's Bride	Both challenge conventional expectations of marriage, but Nagra presents mutual joy whereas Mew reveals fear, coercion and isolation.
Connection across distance	Letters from Yorkshire and Mother, any distance	Both make a physical object represent an emotional bond: letters cross miles, while a measuring tape stretches between parent and child.

Comparison planning grid

Question focus: _____

Named poem: _____

Chosen comparison poem:

Thesis: _____

Planning point	Named poem	Comparison poem
Central idea		
Evidence		
Method and effect		
Context or intention		
Comparison link		
Alternative interpretation		

Model comparative paragraph framework

Statement

Both poets present separation as emotionally significant, but they differ in whether distance is damaging or necessary.

Named poem

In the printed poem, the poet presents... The phrase “...” suggests... The writer’s use of ... emphasises...

Comparison

Similarly or In contrast, in ..., the speaker... The image “...” implies...

Develop the comparison

Whereas the first poet..., the second poet... This difference may reflect...

Link to the question

Therefore, both poems suggest..., although...

Final checklist

- I have answered the exact question.
- My introduction gives a clear comparative thesis.
- Every paragraph discusses both poems.
- My quotations are short, accurate and embedded.
- I analyse specific language, structural or formal choices.
- Context supports my interpretation instead of becoming a separate history paragraph.
- I explain meaningful similarities and differences.
- My conclusion returns to the writers’ overall messages.