Mid Stage 4 English – Selecting and Analysing Poems for an Anthology – Grade A

...Three poems I would recommend being selected for a Year 7 poetry anthology are: "The Sidewalk" by Shel Silverstein, "A Dream..." within a Dream by Edgar Allen Poe, and "Vesuvius" by William Butler Yeats.

Although these poems range in style, rhythm and rhyme, they all discuss different issues/ideas which all students should be aware of.

The poem "The Sidewalk" by Shel Silverstein is perfect for Year 7 study, as it discusses the problems of pollution and destruction of the natural world – significant issues in today’s society.

In the first stanza, the poet describes a place far from our built cities, which is peaceful and unpolluted, using words and phrases such as “...And there the grass grows soft and white... and there the sun burns crimson bright...” Silverstein gives the reader the impression that it is a place which people should value, and which should be kept... if it is...

In the second stanza, the poet describes the dark, dank places which our cities have become, using sentences such as “...when the smoke blows black... And the dark shrouds wind and birds...”

In the third stanza, Silverstein gives the reader ideas of the impression of a place that is so artificial, and built, the only remnants of nature are “asphalt flowers.”

With strong, descriptive language, the poet is able to effectively contrast the two places, so the reader is able to see the differences between somewhere that has yet to be broken down by people... And somewhere that has been destroyed in a sense that nothing normal exists.

Also, the poet implies that children are perhaps the wise ones.
Engages with the poet’s craft and the poems aesthetic qualities in communicating ideas and feelings
Grade Commentary

Jude has demonstrated an extensive knowledge and understanding of the selected poems. The response is synthesised, insightful and well-structured. Textual references that are relevant and well-chosen reflect a high level of personal engagement with the poems. A strong awareness of audience is evident as is understanding of the poet’s craft. Vocabulary and analysis are sophisticated and confident and display an extensive understanding of literary devices and how they create meaning.

Jude’s response demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade A standard midway through Stage 4.

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In this poem, Yeats’ gives the reader the impression that mankind is... perhaps in a way self-centered. Whilst we often kill and slaughter animals, within indifference, we are often filled with dread when faced with death ourselves.

The poet’s use of words such as dying, dreading and decision allows the reader to feel the sadness and negativity of the poem. In addition, the dramatic single word title of the poem, death, helps to intensify this effect.

Because of the dark tone of this poem, the discussion of death, the poet seems to be sending a message to the reader to value life — whether it be theirs, another person’s or another living creature’s.

As I have said before, these poems would be of great use to study, as they all contain strong language and descriptive words. In summary, an important idea which students should be able to at least know about is the impact of language choices and the impact on the reader.