

Ivy League Mentors Presents



Vocab in Poetry: Shakespeare Words

This guide is an excerpt from our textbook, *DSAT Reading & Writing: The Ultimate Guide*. If you found it helpful, you can purchase the full version here and use the promo code SAT25 at checkout for 25% off your purchase:

<https://ivyleaguementorsprep.com/sat/digital-sat-reading-writing-the-ultimate-guide/>

Contents include:

- Specialized strategies for approaching every question type within every domain on the Reading & Writing Section of the Digital SAT, along with realistic practice questions to help you get comfortable applying them.
- Guides to all the important grammar and punctuation concepts covered on the test, along with realistic practice questions to help you master them
- Guides to difficult text types, including poetry and texts with graphics, along with realistic practice questions to help you approach them more effectively
- A carefully curated list of high impact words, along with additional tips to help you develop your vocabulary
- 4 full-length practice modules with comprehensive answer explanations for additional practice and self-assessment

Vocabulary in Poetry

One reason that poetry is challenging for many students is because of vocabulary. The English language is constantly evolving. However, the vocabulary in poems is often more formal and old-fashioned, so you may encounter a lot of words in poems that are no longer in common use or that have different meanings than those to which you are accustomed. This is especially true when you are reading poems written prior to the 1900s. Let's take a look at an example that uses such language.

The following text is from John Burken's 1687 poem "Sonnet 16," in which the speaker addresses his beloved.

Thou art more fair than blossoms newly sprung,
Whose scent hath fled ere yet their song be sung.
The fleeting bloom lies silent, wilted, wrung,
But thou stay'st sweet while all the world's unsung.
The lily leans and dies in April's breath,
The daffodil forgets the light it knew,
Yet in thine eyes, no trace of time or death—
A fire unquenched, a sky forever blue.
The sun declines, and stars will cease to burn,
The oak shall fall, the seas shall shift and freeze,
But thou, through years and ashes, shalt return
Like whispered spring within the autumn breeze.
So let the flowers bow and seasons part—
I'll hold eternal summer in my heart.

Which choice best describes the function of the underlined portion in the text as a whole?

- A. It elaborates on a similarity between the speaker's beloved and flowers introduced in the previous line
- B. It conveys the ephemeral beauty of flowers, which is framed in contrast to the speaker's enduring feelings for his beloved
- C. It utilizes a metaphor to characterize the speaker's beloved as beautiful but superficial
- D. It expresses the speaker's admiration for flowers, which he compares favorably to the song of his beloved

This poem may seem intimidating, but with a knowledge of the language often used in poems, it becomes more approachable. Let's look at those first two lines. Translated into modern English, they might read "you are more beautiful than blossoms newly sprung, whose scent has vanished before their song has been sung." Knowing this, the speaker seems to be suggesting that his mistress is even more beautiful than flowers because the beautiful scent of flowers only lasts a short time. This alone should be enough to lead us to Choice B, which points out the "ephemeral" or short-lasting beauty of flowers. Choice A can be eliminated because the speaker line is elaborating on a difference between the speaker's beloved and flowers rather than a similarity. Choice C can be eliminated because, while the

flower's song may be somewhat metaphorical, it does not characterize the beloved as superficial. Choice D can be eliminated because it is the beloved rather than flowers that the speaker expresses the greatest admiration for.

Shakespeare Words

If you're struggling with language in old poems, we've provided a list of words that you are likely to encounter in them. We call them Shakespeare Words, although he was by no means the only one who used these words extensively. Once you master this short list, you will have a much easier time understanding the older poems you encounter on the Digital SAT.

anon: now

art: are

assay: to try

aught: anything

base: unworthy, illegitimate

beseech: to beg or implore

betwixt: between

chide: to scold or rebuke

cleave: to split or adhere closely to

cozen: to cheat

doth/dost: do/does

ere: before

fain: gladly

fair: beautiful

fie: an exclamation of dismay or disgust

folly: foolishness

forsooth: indeed, in truth

forswear: to renounce or deny under oath

hast/hath: has/have

hark: listen

hence: away

hie: hurry

hither: here

ill: bad, evil

knave: a bad or low-status person

lay: to wager, bet, or predict

kin: a relative

mark: to notice or pay attention to

marry: indeed

mirth: cheerfulness

naught: nothing

oft: often

pray/prithee: please
quoth: said
tarry: to delay or linger
thee/thou: you
thither: there
thy/thine: your
want: lack
whence: from where
whither: to where
wherefore: why
wont: accustomed (to doing something)
yonder: over there

Additional Note: Contractions

Many poems have prescribed meters, and to fit those meters, poets will often use contractions (shortened versions of words with ' to indicate missing letters). We also sometimes do this in everyday language (can't = cannot) but it is far more common in poetry. Therefore, if you see words like 'tis, 'twas, o'er, or ne'er, etc. in a poem, you should be able to recognize the poet means it is, it was, over, never, etc.