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| **Literature Paper 2 Section B: Anthology Poetry**  **Learning compendium**  **‘London’ by Blake** |
| Key ideas  \*Blake was a Romantic Poet and his beliefs were in opposition to the changes happening in Britain.  \*He opposed the Industrial Revolution and believed in the rights and freedom of individual people.  \*In the poem he describes a walk through the city of London: all he sees is misery and despair.  \*He was concerned with the treatment of the lower class, especially the treatment of children. He felt that they were robbed of their childhood and he believed child labour was wrong.  \*During this time disease and malnutrition meant death rates were high.  \*People in power (such as the Church, the monarchy and wealthy landowners) seem to be the cause of the problem but they do nothing to help those in need. |
| Form and structure  First person recount.  Quatrain: 4 lined stanzas, using abab rhyme scheme.  Chronological order and cyclical in structure: every day is the same: repetitive terribly cycle of misery, poverty and death.  Stanza one: repetition of ‘marks’ emphasises the feelings of bleakness and suffering from all.  Stanza two: anaphora structure used in first three lines combined with repetition of ‘cry’ are used to build further examples of suffering and despair. |
| Language  Oppressive language  Stanza one  ‘…chartered street/ …chartered Thames…’ Use of adjective to show the powerful own and/or control parts of the city. Even powerful natural features like the River Thames are under human control. (This is in opposition to the ideas of Romanticism.) Blake seems to be attacking the Capitalist system.  Stanza two  ‘…mind-forged manacles’ Use of metaphor and alliteration to represent how the city’s people are trapped and perhaps to blame. They are imprisoned by their own attitudes. Blake believes the powerless need to rise up against the powerful. (He was also influenced by the French Revolution).  Language to show suffering  Blake presents suffering through descriptions of the people and sights he sees in London.  The noun ‘cry’ is used in stanza 2 to depict the misery and suffering is experienced by all.  The poet also makes a direct reference to child labour (stanza 3) in which he uses children as chimney sweeps to illustrate the violation and injustice of making children work in such dangerous conditions.  In stanza 4 the poet highlights how there is no innocence or purity: even new born babies are affected. The plight of lower class women is also exposed. They have no rights and are forced to sell their bodies (prostitution) to make enough money to survive. It is another part of the endless repetitive cycle of misery.  ‘How the youthful harlot’s curse  Blasts the new-born infant tear’  Use of the adjective ‘youthful’ to show how young women (perhaps even girls) are trapped in a life of misery. The plosive of ‘blasts’ signifies how babies are affected from the moment they are born. No-one can escape this terrible suffering. The poet also gives the suggestion of sexually transmitted infections through the use of ‘curse’.  The oxymoron (‘marriage hearse’ used in the last line represents the illnesses and diseases which were rife at the time of the Industrial Revolution, often due to the living conditions of the poor. It is another cycle that is continuously happening and the poor people are powerless to protect themselves (use of the verb and plosive ‘blights’ has connotations of devastation)  . Blake is suggesting that they are being robbed of their health and their lives.  ‘And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.’  Language to show injustice  Stanza three  ‘Every black’ning church appals’ Multiple interpretations:   1. Could suggest that the church is corrupt and does not provide charity or share its wealth in the way it is supposed to but instead uses it for its own gains (of the few). Blake holds institutions like the church responsible for not ending the suffering. 2. It could also be a reference to the impact of the Industrial Revolution upon the appearance of the city. Everything is dirty and polluted because of the factory smoke.   ‘Runs in blood down palace walls’  May be a reference to the French Revolution. The poet believes ordinary, powerless people are left to suffer whilst those in the palace are protected behind walls. |
| Feelings and attitudes  Anger (of the speaker/ narrator) |
| Themes  Power  Presentation of place  Presentation of people  Political |
| Compare with…  ‘Exposure’ (political poem about injustice)  ‘Storm on the Island’ (political poem about the terrible conflict in Ireland)  ‘Checking out me History’ (presentation of speaker) |
| Key quotations  ‘chartered’  ‘…mind-forged manacles’  ‘Every black’ning church appals’  ‘How the youthful harlot’s curse  Blasts the new-born infant tear’ |
| Glossary  **Chartered** – mapped out  **Mark –** notice  **Woe –** sadness  **Ban -** prohibition  **Manacles** – iron hand cuffs  **Appals** - horrify/horrifies  **Hapless** – unfortunate  **Harlot** – prostitute/promiscuous woman  **Blights** – spoiling or damaging  **Plagues** – illness, destruction  **Hearse** – funeral carriage |