Some background

After World War 1 much of the world was reeling with grief and shock and there was a real sense that the ‘old world’ had vanished forever. Artists, poets and writers began to look for new ways to express this shifting world view.

Task one

Read the list of ‘pre-modern world’ poetry characteristics and match them with their modernist opposites from the list below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-modern world (e.g., Romantic, Victorian Periods)</th>
<th>Early 20th century world (Modernism)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morality/values</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear sense of identity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Futile (pointless)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collapse of morality / values</td>
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</table>

Confused sense of identity or place in the world      |
Chaotic                                              |
Loss of faith                                         |
Task two

Read the following words from T.S Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and select those you like the sound of. Choose up to eight and then when you’ve made your selection create a poem or prose poem from the phrases.

Don’t worry if you don’t understand all of the words or if your poem doesn’t make much sense - the point is to experiment with words and see what happens!

a against an and argument ask certain cheap come do etherized evening follow go half-deserted hotels i in insidious intent lead let like make Michelangelo muttering nights not of oh one-night our out overwhelming oyster-shells patient question ... restaurants restless retreats room sawdust sky spread streets table talking tedious that the then through to upon us visit when with women you “what is it?”

Write your poems in the box below:
Task three

Now read the first stanza of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T. S. Eliot, below.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
Let us go and make our visit.
In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

Task four

1. What do you think the poem is going to be about?

2. Pick out two unfamiliar words on the poem and look these up or discuss with a partner what they mean. Then share your thoughts with the class.

3. When published, this poem was considered shocking and offensive. In particular the line: ‘like a patient etherized upon a table;’ was thought to be particularly outrageous. Why do you think this was?
Task five

Cut out and match the technical term, example and definitions to unpick some of the poetic techniques used by Eliot in his poem.

- **Dramatic monologue (one person talking)**

- **Simile**

- **Rhyming couplet**

- **Realism**

- **Repetition**

- ‘the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized upon a table’ (1)

- ‘In the room the women come and go
  Talking of Michelangelo.’ (2)

- Let us go and make our visit. (3)

- ‘Let us go then ... Let us go ...’ (4)

- ‘sawdust restaurants with oyster shells’ (5)
Words or phrases used more than once for emphasis and effect (a)

A comparison using ‘like’ or ‘as’ (b)

A poem written as if in the voice of its main character to create a feeling of intimacy (c)

A pair of lines ending in the same sound (d)

Specific ‘real life’ details as opposed to romantic or idealised ones (e)

**Task six**

Now look back at the poems you created earlier. Amend/redraft them so that they contain at least three of the poetic techniques that T.S. Eliot used in his poem.
### Teacher’s answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic monologue</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simile</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyming couplet</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>2</td>
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