EXAM STASH

POWER & CONFLICT POETRY

LONDON

WILLIAM BLAKE

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

CONTROL | SUFFERING | INJUSTICE

WHAT HAPPENS?

A first-person speaker walks through London, noticing suffering and the institutions that sustain it.

THE BIG IDEA

Power controls places, people and even their thinking. Blake exposes the human cost.

POEM BREAKDOWN

1 OBSERVANT → TROUBLED



'I wander' introduces a witness; repeated 'marks' makes distress visible.

2 INSISTENT & TRAPPED



Repetition of 'every' accumulates cries; 'mind-forg'd manacles' moves towards inner restriction.

3 ACCUSATORY



The chimney-sweeper, Church, soldier and Palace connect suffering to institutions.

4 BITTER & DESPAIRING



The 'midnight' cries and 'Marriage hearse' suggest damage continuing into the future.

4 KEY QUOTATIONS

'charter'd'	**Method: Repetition** Both streets and river seem owned and controlled.	**Explain:** Shows how power claims and regulates even public spaces.
'mind-forg'd manacles'	**Method: Metaphor** Beliefs and fears become mental chains.	**Explain:** Suggests control reaches into people's minds, keeping them trapped.
'blood down Palace walls'	**Method: Violent imagery** The soldier's suffering accuses royal power.	**Explain:** Exposes the human cost of the state, making the injustice impossible to ignore.
'Marriage hearse'	**Method: Oxymoron** Hope and new life are fused with death.	**Explain:** Suggests a bleak future in which even marriage is tainted by suffering.

FORM & STRUCTURE

- Four regular quatrains and alternating rhyme suggest confinement.
- Repeated 'every' makes suffering pervasive.
- The walk moves from streets and faces towards institutions and a damaged future.

CONTEXT

- *Songs of Experience*, 1794.
- Blake criticises social injustice and the failure of powerful institutions to protect vulnerable people.

COMPARE IT WITH...

- ***Ozymandias*** – abuse of power: Blake witnesses present suffering; Shelley distances us through a traveller's account.
- ***Checking Out Me History*** – institutional control.

VOICE, TONE & FEELINGS

PACE

- Regular beats suggest restriction.
- Accumulating cries increase pressure.

RECALL: HOW DOES BLAKE CONNECT INDIVIDUAL SUFFERING TO POWER?

By showing personal distress (e.g. the chimney-sweeper, soldier and cries) as the direct result of powerful institutions such as the Church, the Palace and the state.