

between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

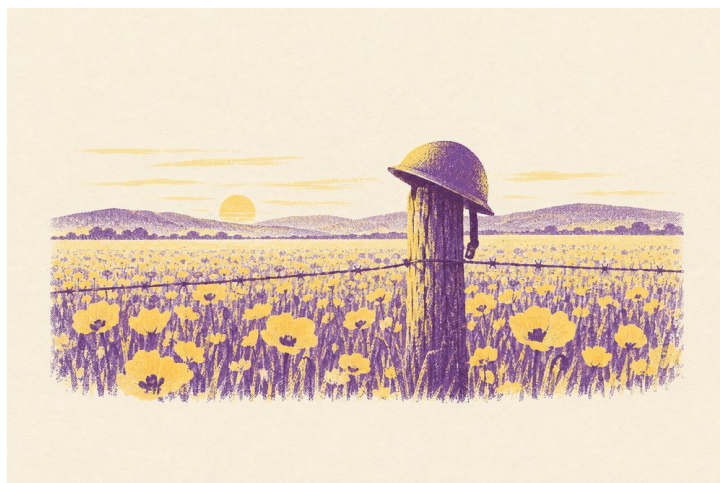
Power and Conflict poetry: My Last Duchess

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to?

Lesson 3 of 24 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the AQA specification



What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our Power and Conflict poetry scheme for Literature Paper 2, Section B. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model paragraph and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 3, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring student packs: one question, three levels of support (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared question answered as a What-How-Why paragraph, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model paragraph and an exit ticket.

In the full scheme

- 24 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook
- Student packs at three levels for every lesson
- Six weeks of independent practice homework at three levels
- Four Feedback Loop progress checks with whole-class feedback sheets and improvement tasks
- An exam-style end-of-unit essay with level guidance and three annotated model answers

Lesson 3: My Last Duchess

SEQUENCE 1: THE POWER OF RULERS • 60 MINUTES

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain who the Duke is talking to in 'My Last Duchess' and why
- Analyse how Browning uses the dramatic monologue, enjambment and the portrait to show the Duke's need for control
- Write a What-How-Why paragraph on what the Duke reveals without meaning to

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0-8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lessons 1 and 2. Students self-mark from the answer slide.	2-3
8-20	Know	Pre-teach dramatic monologue, envoy, arrogance and jealousy. Read the poem aloud twice. On the second reading, students mark every place the Duke speaks to his listener and every place he talks about his late wife.	4-11
20-28	Apply	Explode the quotation together. Think aloud about what the commands might have been and why the Duke does not say, then students annotate their copy. Before you reveal any notes, students try the four empty boxes on the first explode slide, on their own or after you model one box.	12
28-33	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	13-14
33-53	Master	Students write one What-How-Why paragraph using the student pack at their level. Share the model paragraph in the last five minutes and ask students to find the sentence that uses context.	15-16
53-60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of Lesson 4.	17

Do Now answers

1	In 'Ozymandias', who tells the speaker about the statue?	A traveller from an ancient land
2	Ozymandias is the Greek name for which Egyptian pharaoh?	Ramesses II
3	What is left around the broken statue at the end of 'Ozymandias'?	Nothing but empty, flat desert sand
4	In the exam, how many marks is the poetry comparison worth, and roughly how long do you have?	30 marks, about 45 minutes
5	What is enjambment?	A sentence that runs on from one line into the next with no pause

Vocabulary

dramatic monologue	a poem spoken by one character to a silent listener, which shows more about the speaker than they mean to
envoy	a messenger sent to agree a deal for someone else
arrogance	believing you are more important than other people
jealousy	anger or fear that someone you think belongs to you is giving attention to others

Reading

My Last Duchess

Read the poem twice: once to work out who the Duke is talking to, once listening for what he lets slip.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but
thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning, 1842

Word help **countenance**: face, or the look on a face • **officious**: too eager to help, interfering • **munificence**: great generosity with money • **dowry**: money or property a bride's family gives when she marries

Explode the quotation

Method

A short main clause, a semicolon, then enjambment that carries the reader into the next line.

Zoom in

"commands" is plural and vague. The Duke never says what he ordered, and he does not need to.

“I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together”

Effect

The calm tone is chilling. The reader realises that the Duchess was silenced or killed, and that the Duke feels no guilt.

Context

The Duke of Ferrara is thought to be based on Alfonso II d'Este, whose young first wife died in suspicious circumstances.

Hinge question

Who is the Duke talking to in ‘My Last Duchess’?

- A. His new wife, who is looking at the portrait.
- B. The painter, Fra Pandolf.
- C. An envoy sent by a Count to arrange the Duke’s next marriage. (the right answer)**

What the answers tell you

A means the student has missed that the marriage is still being arranged: point to the lines about the Count and the dowry and start these students on Securing. B means the student has taken the painter’s name as the listener: show that Fra Pandolf is only talked about, and ask who the Duke tells to sit and to rise.

Why the answer is right

The Duke is showing the portrait to the envoy of the Count whose daughter he plans to marry, so his story is also a warning.

Master task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in ‘My Last Duchess’?

Securing aiming for a 4

Quotations to choose from

“too soon made glad”

“My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name”

“I choose / Never to stoop”

Starters

Browning lets the Duke reveal that he is _____. The Duke says _____. The _____ (adjective) _____ (word class) _____ suggests _____. Browning wants the reader to see _____ because _____.

Strengthening aiming for grades 5 to 6

Prompts

What: Make a clear point about something the Duke shows about himself without meaning to.

How: Choose a quotation. Name the method (dramatic monologue, enjambment, caesura) and zoom in on one word.

Why: How should the envoy, and the reader, feel about the Count’s daughter marrying this man?

Soaring aiming for grades 7 to 9

The debate

“The Duke tells this story on purpose, as a warning. How far do you agree?”

Write two paragraphs. In the second, give an alternative reading that begins with Alternatively.

Model paragraph

What	Browning lets the Duke reveal that his pride matters more to him than his wife’s life.
How	The Duke complains that she treated “My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name” like any small gift. The long, hyphenated adjective shows how heavily he values his family name. He then says “I choose / Never to stoop”. The enjambment makes the reader wait on “choose”, so his refusal to speak to her sounds cold and deliberate. Soon after comes “I gave commands”, spoken as calmly as a list of chores.

Why

Because this is a dramatic monologue, the Duke never hears himself. The reader does. The Duke of Ferrara is thought to be based on Alfonso II d'Este, whose young first wife died in suspicious circumstances, so Browning makes us fear for the next Duchess.

Exit ticket

The most worrying thing the Duke reveals without meaning to is...

Teacher notes**Subject knowledge**

'My Last Duchess' (1842) is a dramatic monologue in rhyming couplets with heavy enjambment, so the rhyme is there but hard to hear: a voice kept under control. The Duke shows a portrait of his late wife, painted by Fra Pandolf, to the envoy of a Count whose daughter he plans to marry. He resents that she smiled at everyone, would not stoop to correct her, and says "I gave commands". He then turns straight to the dowry and to a bronze of Neptune. The Duke is thought to be based on Alfonso II d'Este.

Common misconceptions

- Saying the Duke is talking to his new wife. The marriage is still being arranged through the envoy.
- Stating as fact that the Duke had the Duchess killed. The poem implies it, so students should use verbs such as suggests and implies.
- Reading the Duchess as unfaithful. The Duke's complaints are about her kindness and her smiles.
- Missing the rhyme. Every pair of lines rhymes, even though the sentences run on. In an essay, keep Ferrara and Alfonso II to a phrase: AQA's June 2023 report found that narrative detail about the Duke of Ferrara and Lucrezia did little to develop an answer about power.

Adapting the lesson

Everyone answers the same question about the same poem. Students who chose A or B in the hinge question start on Securing. Move anyone who completes the Securing frame in ten minutes to the Strengthening prompts for a second paragraph. Students who can already build their own argument start on Soaring.

Inclusion

Pre-teach	Envoy and dowry, with a two-box picture: the Duke and the envoy in front of a curtained portrait, and a bag of money for the dowry.
SEND	Split the poem into four parts on the copy (the portrait, her smiles, the commands, the dowry) and work on one part at a time. Give the What sentence already written.
EAL	Explain stoop as both bending down and lowering yourself, and act it out. Add the formal words munificence and officious to the translation column of the word list.
Pupil premium	Build the picture of an Italian duke's palace: paintings, servants, arranged marriages and dowries. Question a disadvantaged student first on who the listener is, since the rest of the poem depends on it.

Homework

Learn "I gave commands" and "I choose / Never to stoop" by heart. Then write two sentences comparing the Duke with the king in 'Ozymandias'.

My Last Duchess

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to?

Securing

aiming for a 4

Do Now: five quick questions

- 1 In 'Ozymandias', who tells the speaker about the statue?
- 2 Ozymandias is the Greek name for which Egyptian pharaoh?
- 3 What is left around the broken statue at the end of 'Ozymandias'?
- 4 In the exam, how many marks is the poetry comparison worth, and roughly how long do you have?
- 5 What is enjambment?

Vocabulary

dramatic monologue	a poem spoken by one character to a silent listener, which shows more about the speaker than they mean to
envoy	a messenger sent to agree a deal for someone else
arrogance	believing you are more important than other people
jealousy	anger or fear that someone you think belongs to you is giving attention to others

Reading

My Last Duchess

Read the poem twice: once to work out who the Duke is talking to, once listening for what he lets slip.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning, 1842

Word help **countenance:** face, or the look on a face · **officious:** too eager to help, interfering · **munificence:** great generosity with money · **dowry:** money or property a bride's family gives when she marries

Explode the quotation

Try each box on your own first. Then add to it as your teacher explodes the quotation.

Method	Zoom in
“I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together”	
Effect	Context

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in ‘My Last Duchess’?

Word bank

dramatic monologue	a poem spoken by one character to a silent listener
arrogance	believing you are more important than other people
control	power over what someone else does or says
enjambment	a sentence running on from one line into the next

Choose your quotations

- “too soon made glad”
- “My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name”
- “I choose / Never to stoop”

Worked example

The Duke controls who sees his wife’s portrait. He says it is hidden behind “The curtain I have drawn for you”, which suggests he now owns her smile completely.

The example uses a different quotation. Choose one from the list above for your own paragraph.

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in 'My Last Duchess'?

Write your paragraph

What: Browning lets the Duke reveal that he is ____.

How: The Duke says _____. The _____ (adjective) _____ (word class) _____ suggests _____.

Why: Browning wants the reader to see _____ because _____.

Exit ticket

The most worrying thing the Duke reveals without meaning to is...

My Last Duchess

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to?

Strengthening

aiming for grades 5 to 6

Do Now: five quick questions

- 1 In 'Ozymandias', who tells the speaker about the statue?
- 2 Ozymandias is the Greek name for which Egyptian pharaoh?
- 3 What is left around the broken statue at the end of 'Ozymandias'?
- 4 In the exam, how many marks is the poetry comparison worth, and roughly how long do you have?
- 5 What is enjambment?

Vocabulary

dramatic monologue	a poem spoken by one character to a silent listener, which shows more about the speaker than they mean to
envoy	a messenger sent to agree a deal for someone else
arrogance	believing you are more important than other people
jealousy	anger or fear that someone you think belongs to you is giving attention to others

Reading

My Last Duchess

Read the poem twice: once to work out who the Duke is talking to, once listening for what he lets slip.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning, 1842

Word help **countenance:** face, or the look on a face · **officious:** too eager to help, interfering · **munificence:** great generosity with money · **dowry:** money or property a bride's family gives when she marries

Explode the quotation

Try each box on your own first. Then add to it as your teacher explodes the quotation.

Method	Zoom in
“I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together”	
Effect	Context

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in ‘My Last Duchess’?

What, How and Why

What	Make a clear point about something the Duke shows about himself without meaning to.
How	Choose a quotation. Name the method (dramatic monologue, enjambment, caesura) and zoom in on one word.
Why	How should the envoy, and the reader, feel about the Count's daughter marrying this man?

Plan your paragraph

My point answers the question	
My quotation short and exact	
Method and zoom the method, and the one word I will explore	
The poet's purpose what they wanted readers to think or do	

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in 'My Last Duchess'?

Write your paragraph

Check your paragraph

- ☐ My point answers the question
- ☐ I use a short, embedded quotation
- ☐ I name a method and zoom in on one word
- ☐ I explain the gap between what the Duke says and what the reader sees
- ☐ I link to the context of the Duke of Ferrara inside my point

Exit ticket

The most worrying thing the Duke reveals without meaning to is...

My Last Duchess

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to?

Soaring

aiming for grades 7 to 9

Do Now: five quick questions

- 1 In 'Ozymandias', who tells the speaker about the statue?
- 2 Ozymandias is the Greek name for which Egyptian pharaoh?
- 3 What is left around the broken statue at the end of 'Ozymandias'?
- 4 In the exam, how many marks is the poetry comparison worth, and roughly how long do you have?
- 5 What is enjambment?

Vocabulary

dramatic monologue	a poem spoken by one character to a silent listener, which shows more about the speaker than they mean to
envoy	a messenger sent to agree a deal for someone else
arrogance	believing you are more important than other people
jealousy	anger or fear that someone you think belongs to you is giving attention to others

Reading

My Last Duchess

Read the poem twice: once to work out who the Duke is talking to, once listening for what he lets slip.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning, 1842

Word help **countenance**: face, or the look on a face · **officious**: too eager to help, interfering · **munificence**: great generosity with money · **dowry**: money or property a bride's family gives when she marries

Explode the quotation

Try each box on your own first. Then add to it as your teacher explodes the quotation.

Method	Zoom in
“I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together”	
Effect	Context

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in ‘My Last Duchess’?

The debate

“The Duke tells this story on purpose, as a warning. How far do you agree?”

Write two paragraphs. In the second, give an alternative reading that begins with Alternatively.

Think about

- Why the Duke tells the story to the envoy of his next bride’s father
- How the rhyming couplets, hidden by enjambment, sound like a man keeping his voice under control
- The bronze of Neptune taming a sea-horse that the Duke points out as they leave

Verbs to try

betrays · controls · conceals · threatens · objectifies

Plan your argument

My argument	Testing it: another reading

Your task

How does Browning let the Duke reveal more than he means to in 'My Last Duchess'?

Write your answer

Exit ticket

The most worrying thing the Duke reveals without meaning to is...