

AP English Literature and Composition Poetry Responses

Bi-weekly you will choose a poem from your poetry packet (or your anthology upon approval by me) and write a detailed response to the poem. At least one of your responses during the semester must be a comparison based on the final poems in your packet or two poems from the anthology that you link thematically (discuss your choices with me in advance). In completing your response, DO NOT research the poem via the internet or any other source. You will not have access to those resources on the AP exam, so using them rather than your own analysis skills will actually hinder your progress and success in this class. You should, however, use the dictionary to determine the meaning of words with which you are unfamiliar.

I. Annotation of Poem:

Follow each of these steps as you analyze the poem before writing your explication. Make notes about each step on the poem itself.

1. Notice the title. Make notes about your initial reactions at the top of the poem.
2. Locate the independent clauses in the poem, and read them individually. (They will often not end at the ends of the lines.) Notice any that are questions. For each independent clause, underline the subject once and verb twice.
3. Look up words that you do not know, maintaining awareness of both denotative and connotative meanings. Underline these words, and write synonyms above the words in the poem.
4. Look for figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, symbol, allusion). Circle them and draw an arrow to the comparison—or explain the comparison if it is implied.
5. Identify the speaker in this poem. From what point of view is the poem written? What is the occasion? Is it spoken to someone in particular? Make some notes about your ideas.
6. Locate the shift(s) in the poem (in point of view, tone, and focus); draw a dividing line and briefly explain the change. Notice the "turning" words (but, so, yet, however); make an asterisk beside these.
7. Identify the tone of the poem (or tones if there is a shift). Write and circle the tone word(s) in the margin and draw arrows to elements of the poem that support the tone.
8. Read the poem again, aloud, preferably to someone else. Then, complete this sentence at the bottom of the page: *The poem "[title]" by [poet] is about [topic], and it reveals [observation about humanity].*

II. Personal Response to Poem:

Compose a minimum of one paragraph that expresses your personal response to the poem. Be precise in writing about how the poem's theme, focus, and/or details connect to your own human experience.

III. Explication of Poem:

Compose a 1 to 2 page typed response (longer if hand-written) in which you explain *what* the poem means and *how* it means.

- Focus on your central task throughout the essay.
- Clearly state the theme of the poem early in your explication as well as include the name of the poem (in quotation marks) and the poet. In your introduction, you may choose to include a brief summary of the narrative or situation described in the poem.
- Explain how the theme is developed through significant literary devices and the poem's structure (if applicable) with multiple, specific examples from the text in

each paragraph. Choose focused quotations instead of quoting multiple lines to which you refer only ambiguously.

- Organize your ideas logically and organically so that each paragraph is unified around a specific idea. Do not organize according to literary device. Do not write one giant paragraph!
- Only discuss literary elements that enhance the meaning of the poem; if an element is irrelevant to the theme, leave it out. Do not mention literary devices and then fail to explain them with supporting evidence.
- Don't forget the power and significance of the title. However, if the title is simply the first line or a number (as in Dickinson's poems and many sonnets), don't discuss it in your analysis.
- End your explication with a conclusion that suggests what this poem teaches you about humanity.
- Incorporate a minimum of four vocabulary words (which you must underline).

How to Quote Poetry:

When you write about a poem, your challenge is to convey the meaning of the work and the craft of the poet in selecting precise, descriptive quotations that support your ideas. Your writing will contain more vitality if you present the reader with several words, phrases, lines, or passages exactly as the poet has expressed them. Quoting from poetry, however, is different than quoting from prose.

Here are some sample quotations from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" to help you more skillfully quote poetry:

1. **If you wish to quote more than two lines of a poem, maintain the form the poet used.**

*Describing the "thin blue flame" on the grate, the speaker reflects,
Methinks its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form (17-19)*

2. **If you wish to quote fewer than two complete lines, transform the quoted material into prose form. Use a diagonal line (/) to indicate where the poet chose to begin and end lines of poetry.**

The speaker recalls the limitations of his own childhood, pointing out that "[he] was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim . . ." (51-52), and dreams of a different life and environment for his child.

3. **If your quotation is lengthy and you wish to omit entire lines, show the omission of the line or lines by using a series of spaced periods that approximates the length of the line.**

*The eerily desolate environment of the quiet home in the late night inspires the speaker's complex and anxious thoughts on his role as a new father:
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings; . . .
.....
'Tis calm indeed! So calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. (4-6, 8-10)*

4. **If it is obvious that only a word or phrase is being quoted, there is no need for ellipsis.**

The speaker envisions a delightful childhood for his son, different from his own where the church bells were "the poor man's only music" (29).