

Hints for Making Progress on the Poetry Portfolio Explications

Helpful hints for writing poetry explications:

- Fully annotate each poem before attempting to write your explication. You must know your poems well before you can write effectively about them.
- Clearly state your theme early in your explication. Make sure that you are explaining what opinion the poem asserts about human nature.
- Support each element of your interpretation with several specific examples from the text. Choose focused quotations instead of quoting multiple lines to which you refer only ambiguously.
- Do not mention literary devices and then fail to explain them with supporting evidence.
- Only discuss literary elements that enhance the meaning of the poem. If an element is irrelevant to your theme, leave it out.
- Do not write one giant paragraph. Organize your ideas so that each paragraph is unified around a specific idea and so that each paragraph leads logically to the next.
- Don't forget the power and significance of the title. However, if the title is simply the first line or a number (as is Dickinson's poems and many sonnets), don't discuss it in your analysis.

Helpful hints for quoting 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. 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).