

Preparing for the Poetry Essay

Literary Device Review

Review our poetry terms list. **Be prepared to not only point out specific literary/poetic techniques but also to explain their contribution to the overall meaning of the poem.**

Terms most commonly referenced in this prompt:

Review these terms carefully and note what falls under each category. Consider how each of these contributes to the meaning of a poem.

Figurative language

Tone

Imagery

Structure/form

Diction

Point of view

Sample Prompts

Read through these prompts from recent years. Notice how the prompt usually gives you an important clue about the poem to follow.

2012: In the following poem by Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), the speaker addresses the subject of desire. Read the poem carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how poetic devices help to convey the speaker's complex attitude toward desire.

Thou Blind Man's Mark

- Thou blind man's mark,* thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought;
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought;
5 Desire, desire! I have too dearly bought,
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
Who should my mind to higher things prepare.
But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought;
10 In vain thou madest me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindlest all thy smoky fire;
For virtue hath this better lesson taught—
Within myself to seek my only hire,*
Desiring naught but how to kill desire.
- *target
- *reward

2013: "The Black Walnut Tree" (you have a copy of this one)

2015: In the following poem by Caribbean writer Derek Walcott, the speaker recalls a childhood experience of visiting an elderly woman storyteller. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-developed essay, discuss the speaker's recollection and analyze how Walcott uses poetic devices to convey the significance of the experience.

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- With the frenzy of an old snake shedding its skin,
the speckled road, scored with ruts, smelling of mold,
twisted on itself and reentered the forest
where the dasheen* leaves thicken and folk stories begin.
- 5 Sunset would threaten us as we climbed closer
to her house up the asphalt hill road, whose yam vines
wrangled over gutters with the dark reek of moss,
the shutters closing like the eyelids of that mimosa*
called Ti-Marie; then—lucent as paper lanterns,
- 10 lamplight glowed through the ribs, house after house—
there was her own lamp at the black twist of the path.
There's childhood, and there's childhood's aftermath.
She began to remember at the minute of the fireflies,
to the sound of pipe water banging in kerosene tins,
- 15 stories she told to my brother and myself.
Her leaves were the libraries of the Caribbean.
The luck that was ours, those fragrant origins!
Her head was magnificent, Sidone. In the gully of her voice
shadows stood up and walked, her voice travels my shelves.
She was the lamplight in the stare of two mesmerized boys still joined in one shadow, indivisible twins.
- *tropical plant with large leaves
- *plant whose leaves close/droop when touched or shaken

Putting Your Best Foot Forward

- 1) Use the poet's name and the title of the poem in the introduction. **"Title in Quotation Marks"**
- 2) **Correctly identify the speaker.** Don't assume the poet is the speaker. Don't confuse the subject with the speaker. This will help you identify the **point of view** of the poem.
- 3) **Identify tone(s)**—so much of the poem's meaning is wrapped up in its tone. You can also discuss the speaker's "attitude towards" or "feelings of"—these are the same as tone.

****Watch out for SARCASM! Sarcasm changes the meaning of the poem drastically.**

- 4) If the poem has 14 lines in a single stanza, it's likely a **sonnet**. Check the rhyme scheme.
- 5) Avoid phrases like, "paints a picture" and "helps the reader relate more." They don't really help you.
- 6) When quoting from the poem, **use / to signify a line break**. Do not "clump" quotations together—if they appear separately in the poem, quote them separately in your essay.
- 7) Remember to use the precise verbs and adjectives you recorded on the other page.

Preparing for the Prose Passage Essay

Directions: Below you will find the Q2 prompts from the last five years of the AP Lit. exam. Read them and underline the MAIN task. Then discuss with your group what the prompts have in common.

2015: The following excerpt is from the opening of *The Beet Queen*, a 1986 novel by Louise Erdrich. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Erdrich depicts the impact of the environment on the two children. You may wish to consider such literary devices as tone, imagery, selection of detail, and point of view.

2014: The following passage is from the novel *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the author reveals the character of Moses. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as point of view, selection of detail, and imagery.

2013: The following passage is from D. H. Lawrence's 1915 novel, *The Rainbow*, which focuses on the lives of the Brangwens, a farming family who lived in rural England during the late nineteenth century. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lawrence employs literary devices to characterize the woman and capture her situation.

2012: Carefully read the following excerpt from the novel *Under the Feet of Jesus* by Helena María Viramontes. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the development of Estrella's character. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as selection of detail, figurative language, and tone

2011: The following passage is from the novel *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, the pen name of Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880). In the passage, Rosamond and Tertius Lydgate, a recently married couple, confront financial difficulties. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Eliot portrays these two characters and their complex relationship as husband and wife. You may wish to consider such literary devices as narrative perspective and selection of detail.

Now circle any "literary devices" or "literary elements" suggested in the individual prompts. What else do you think would be considered a literary device/element worth analyzing? Make a list below:

In order to answer one of these prompts, you'll need to do a close reading of the passage provided.

Tips for a Close Reading

1. WHAT: Read the passage in its entirety focusing on its literal content. WHAT is actually happening here?

- Take brief, shorthand notes in the margins.
- Divide into sections when you see a clear shift of topics.
- Summarize the passage in your mind.

2. HOW: Now begin analyzing HOW the author put this passage together. Mark any and all literary devices or elements you can find.

- If the prompt suggests considering certain elements/devices/techniques, note these first!
- Find and mark any and all others during this second read:
 - Details (what is included and what is not)
 - Tone
 - Narrative perspective or point of view
 - Characterization
 - Imagery
 - Syntax
 - Diction
 - Figurative Language
 - Pairs and patterns (where they exist; where they break)

****Note:** See list you created on the first page of this packet**

- Mark connections between different elements

3. WHY: Finally consider the deeper meaning of the entire passage. Summarize WHY the author created the passage this way. Look for the PURPOSE of the passage. Use the following questions to guide your thinking:

- What thematic idea(s) emerge in just this passage?
- Are these ideas complete? Or is the author beginning to explore something?
- From this passage, what can the reader learn about the character(s)? Their situations? Their relationships?
- What other purpose(s) does this passage seem to have? Does it establish or develop some element of the story besides characters (setting, conflict, etc.)

Looking back at the prompt and considering your what-how-why analysis, now decide the organization you will use for this essay.

- Chronological analysis to show development through the passage (the “what” pieces)
- Analysis by literary elements (the “how” pieces)**
- Analysis by purposes of the passage, beginning with the most significant (the “why” pieces)

****Students tend to be most comfortable with this choice; however, you must choose your labels wisely! Too specific, you'll miss some major analytical points. Too broad, you'll have trouble deciding where to put your evidence because of overlap. This choice also tends to lead to the predictable 5-paragraph essay—not always the best choice.**

2017 AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS**Question 2**

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the passage below, from *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) by Tobias Smollett, Mr. Pickle encounters Godfrey Gauntlet, the brother of his beloved Emilia. Consider how the two men confront their own uncontrolled emotions and yet attempt to abide by their social norms. In a well-developed essay, analyze how the author explores the complex interplay between emotions and social propriety in the passage. You may wish to consider such literary techniques as dialogue, narrative pace, and tone.

Line
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“Mr. Pickle, you have carried on a correspondence with my sister for some time, and I should be glad to know the nature of it.” To this question our lover replied, “Sir, I should be glad to know what title you have to demand that satisfaction?”—“Sir,” answered the other, “I demand it in the capacity of a brother, jealous of his own honour, as well as of his sister’s reputation; and if your intentions are honourable, you will not refuse it.”—“Sir,” said Peregrine, “I am not at present disposed to appeal to your opinion for the rectitude of my intentions: and I think you assume a little too much importance, in pretending to judge my conduct.”—“Sir,” replied the soldier, “I pretend to judge the conduct of every man who interferes with my concerns, and even to chastise him, if I think he acts amiss.”—“Chastise!” cried the youth, with indignation in his looks, “sure you dare not apply that term to me?”—“You are mistaken,” said Godfrey; “I dare do anything that becomes the character of a gentleman.”—“Gentleman, God wot!” replied the other, looking contemptuously at his equipage,* which was none of the most superb, “a very pretty gentleman, truly!”

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The soldier’s wrath was inflamed by this ironical repetition, the contempt of which his conscious poverty made him feel; and he called his antagonist presumptuous boy, insolent upstart, and with other epithets, which Perry retorted with great bitterness. A formal challenge having passed between them, they alighted at the first inn, and walked into the next field, in order to decide their quarrel by the sword. Having pitched upon the spot, helped to pull off each other’s boots, and laid aside their coats and waistcoats, Mr. Gauntlet told his opponent, that he himself was

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looked upon in the army as an expert swordsman, and that if Mr. Pickle had not made that science his particular study, they should be upon a more equal footing in using pistols. Peregrine was too much incensed to thank him for his plain dealing, and too confident of his own skill to relish the other’s proposal, which he accordingly rejected: then, drawing his sword, he observed, that were he to treat Mr. Gauntlet according to his deserts, he would order his man to punish his audacity with a horsewhip. Exasperated at this expression, which he considered an indelible affront, he made no reply, but attacked his adversary with equal ferocity and address. The youth parried his first and second thrust, but received the third in the outside of his sword-arm. Though the wound was superficial, he was transported with rage at the sight of his own blood, and returned the assault with such fury and precipitation, that Gauntlet, loath to take advantage of his unguarded heat, stood upon the defensive. In the second lunge, Peregrine’s weapon entering a kind of network in the shell of Godfrey’s sword, the blade snapped in two, and left him at the mercy of the soldier, who, far from making an insolent use of the victory he had gained, put up his Toledo with great deliberation, like a man who had been used to that kind of rencounters, and observed that such a blade as Peregrine’s was not to be trusted with a man’s life: then advising the owner to treat a gentleman in distress with more respect for the future, he slipped on his boots, and with sullen dignity of demeanour stalked back to the inn.

*carriage and horse

Preparing for the Open Question Essay

Major Works Review

For each work, compile the following information:

- 1) List of major characters and their connections with one another
- 2) Plot line of the key events in chronological order
- 3) Key literary devices or narrative techniques characteristic of this work (examples for *Candide*: fast narrative pace, foils, hyperbole/understatement, satire [juvenalian and horatian], suspension of disbelief, resurrection motif, humorous tone, etc.)
- 4) Key thematic ideas (WHY statements).

Sample Prompts

Read through these prompts from recent years. Which work would you use on each one? If you have time, create an outline for a few of them.

2011: In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.” Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

2012: “And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” (Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*)

Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.

2013: A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

2014: It has often been said that what we value can be determined only by what we sacrifice. Consider how this statement applies to a character from a novel or play. Select a character that has deliberately sacrificed, surrendered, or forfeited something in a way that highlights that character's values. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character's values and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole.

2015: In literary works, cruelty often functions as a crucial motivation or a major social or political factor. Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which acts of cruelty are important to the theme. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing how cruelty functions in the work as a whole and what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim.

Putting Your Best Foot Forward

- 1) Know the author and title. Spell them both correctly. **Underline the title.**
- 2) Use **literary present tense**. Write as though the story is unfolding this very moment.
- 3) Use **precise language**—brush up on your best adjectives (especially tone words) and verbs. Using the mad-glad-sad handout and/or other online searches, list some of your favorites to review the night before the exam.

*****Hint: Try google searches for "active verbs," "strong tone words," and "best verbs for literary analysis."***

MY FAVORITE VERBS:

MY FAVORITE ADJECTIVES (for tone identification, character descriptions, etc.):