

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ESSAY #3: POETRY

Due date: The final due date is Wednesday, April 26 at 11:59 PM.

How to submit the essay: You will submit the essay through Blackboard, through the same link where you found the essay assignment sheet. This will be in the Essay Assignments folder. The essay must be submitted as either a .docx or .pdf file.

This essay will be **2-3 pages** in length; **you may not use any outside sources** (with the exception of looking up definitions or references you're unfamiliar with). Note that because the due date is so late in the semester, I will not be able to offer the opportunity of a rewrite for essays which use outside sources and/or are plagiarized for rewrites; **a plagiarized essay will receive a zero.**

Topic: Your assignment is to write an **explication** of a poem. (An explication is a detailed analysis of the meaning of a poem. The Latin word from which the verb "to explicate" is derived means "to unfold," and this is your goal: to unfold for the reader the poem's meaning.)

Here is the list of poems from which you may choose, along with their page numbers in your textbook (note that you may **not** substitute any other poems for these):

Emma Bolden, "House Is an Enigma" (904)
Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" (789-790)
Gwen Harwood, "In the Park" (998)
Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays" (872)
Seamus Heaney, "Digging" (1196-1197)
Andrew Hudgins, "Begotten" (878-879)
Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise" (866-867)
Pat Mora, "Elena" (1082)
Linda Pastan, "To a Daughter Leaving Home" (1204-1205)

Preparing to write the essay: First, you will need to spend a considerable amount of time reading and analyzing the poem, with the goal of fully understanding its meaning. Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of your reading of the poem.

- Consider the title; does it tell you anything about the meaning of the poem?
- Read the poem slowly and carefully several times; it also may be helpful to read it aloud.
- Look up any words you don't know; precise definitions (and multiple definitions) of words may be crucial in fully understanding a poem.
- Look up any historical or mythological references you are unfamiliar with; these, too, may be crucial in understanding the poem.
- You might consider writing a summary of the poem in prose form. (Bear in mind that an explication is not simply a summary; the purpose of the summary is to help you get a clearer sense of what the poem is about.)
- Break the poem into sections and analyze each section closely.

- Do analyze closely, considering the possible significance of small details; *don't*, however, become so bogged down in the details that you lose sight of the big picture – the poem's overall meaning.

Once you are thoroughly familiar with the poem's meaning, consider which poetic techniques play a significant role in getting the poem's meaning across. These techniques may include:

- Voice (speaker, tone)
 - Word choice (including formal/informal diction, word order)
 - Imagery
 - Figures of speech (such as metaphor, simile, or personification)
 - Sound (alliteration, assonance, rhyme)
 - Form (including arrangement of the poem, number of lines, repetition, punctuation) ■
- Symbols

Refer to the chapters on poetry in your textbook for guidance on the poetic techniques listed above. Bear in mind that not all poems will use all these techniques (for instance, a poem may not contain any irony); look for those techniques which are a) present in the poem and b) significant in interpreting the poem's meaning. In other words, ***you do not need to discuss all the techniques listed above***; only include those which are relevant to your particular poem.

Note: Your discussion does ***not*** need to be highly technical. In other words, I will not expect you to identify the poem as a sonnet with an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme. Also, ***DO NOT INCLUDE ANY POETIC TECHNIQUES NOT DISCUSSED IN CLASS!***

Here is a link to some questions you might want to ask yourself about the poem as you develop your explication:

<http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tlc/files/2016/08/Ten-Tips-for-Analyzing-Poetry.pdf>

Again, these questions are just a starting point; you don't have to answer every single question in your essay.

DO NOT READ ANYONE ELSE'S INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM. Do not use any outside sources at all (except looking up word meanings/references). Your interpretation must be entirely your own. I don't want to see discussion of literary techniques other than the ones we have discussed in our class; this is often a red flag that you have looked at other source material.

Structuring your essay: Begin your ***introduction*** by briefly stating what the poem is about; end the introduction with a ***thesis statement*** conveying your interpretation of the poem's meaning. (Bear in mind that there is no single, correct interpretation of a poem; the key is that you can justify your reading with evidence from the poem. An effective interpretation should be able to

account for all the details in the poem; be sure there aren't any details which contradict your reading.)

Structure the *main body* of your essay by moving through the poem *in order*, explaining its meaning *section by section, one paragraph per section* (stanzas or other natural groupings of lines). Some poems are already divided into sections; with other poems, you will have to determine where to divide it for yourself (look for shifts in subject matter to determine where to break each section off). The number of paragraphs in the main body will depend on how many sections you've divided the poem into. If it's a very short poem you might be able to discuss every line; if it's a longer poem you will need to be more selective about which lines and details you discuss. Be careful not to skip over any significant sections or words.

Use *frequent, specific, brief quotes* from the poem (which sometimes may be as short as a single word) to support your interpretation of each section. (Remember to quote no more than the minimum amount you need to make your point.) When quoting from a line of poetry, *cite the line number* (not the page in the textbook) by placing it in parentheses. When quoting more than one line, place a slash between the two lines. Example: "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive" (1-2).

Do *not* quote an entire section of a poem, followed by a discussion of it. Instead, blend short quotes into your discussion, fitting them naturally and grammatically into your sentences.

While you don't need a full, formal conclusion, be sure that you end your essay smoothly, with a note of finality. You may choose to tie the larger meanings of the poem together in your last sentence or two.

Remember to allow yourself sufficient time to go through all stages of the writing process: invention, planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

You are *not* required to include a Works Cited page in your paper. If you quote dictionary definitions (which I would prefer you not do if at all possible), mention the name and edition of the dictionary in your text.

For more guidance:

You can view sample explications at the following site:

<http://www.unm.edu/~aobermei/Eng200/samplepapers/>

(The site contains a variety of papers; look specifically for explications. Do note, however, that your explication doesn't have to be quite as technical as these.)

You may e-mail me a rough version of your essay if you would like me to look at it and give you feedback. Be sure to allow enough time for me to respond, and for you to make use of my comments. I will not accept any drafts sent less than 72 hours (three days) before the paper is

due; **I will only look at one draft per student.** I will not guarantee a response to any e-mailed questions sent less than 24 hours before the essay is due.