

LTF English Mock Exam Lesson Poetry Analysis 2012 Student Activity



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INITIATIVE

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Poetry Analysis

In the spring of 2012, AP* students were provided with a poem by Sir Philip Sidney entitled “Thou Blind Man’s Mark.” The prompt directed exam takers to analyze how the author conveys the speaker’s complex attitude toward desire through the use of poetic devices.

Test takers must read closely to sort out poetic devices used by the author to convey the speaker’s complex attitude toward desire. These ideas must be coherently organized and supported with evidence from the passage. As a Renaissance poet in the mid-1500s, Sir Philip Sidney used language that appealed to the audience of the most socially and economically influential citizens of London and surrounding areas. The following activities are intended to help shape stylistically mature and effective essays based on this challenging passage.

I. Deconstructing the Prompt

The first step to a successful literary analysis is the deconstruction of the prompt to discover the writing task. In the prompt below, highlight, circle, or underline the elements of the prompt that direct your essay.

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.

II. Analyzing the Prompt

Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. What is the title of the poem? Underline or quotation marks? _____

2. What is the historical context in which the poem was written? _____

3. Who is the author? How will you refer to the author in your essay? _____

4. What is the focus of the prompt? _____

5. What “poetic devices” will help you identify the attitude of the speaker? Why? _____

6. Are the speaker and the author the same? Why or why not? How do you know? _____

III. Interact with the poem

Mark and annotate the poem according to the following instructions.

A. Highlight the allusion in the title and first line and explain. _____

B. Highlight the archaic language.

C. Highlight words with strong connotative meanings.

D. Bracket the author’s use of apostrophe as a poetic device and explain its effect. _____

E. Draw a line where you see a narrative shift in the poem. Justify your selection by annotating the poem with a brief explanation.

F. Circle any words that are repeated.

G. Underline the beginning letters of words used in alliteration.

H. Mark the rhyme scheme of the poem.

I. Place an X on any lines of inverted syntax. What is the effect of the author’s use of unusual sentence structure on the attitude of the speaker toward Desire? _____

J. Paraphrase the poem.

K. Based on the highlighting, circling, and underlining, can you make any overall observations about the poem? Could any of these contribute to the speaker’s complex attitude toward desire? _____

Thou Blind Man's Mark

Thou blind man's mark,¹ 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,²
Desiring naught but how to kill desire.

1 target

2 reward

IV. Analysis of Poetic Device

Select poetic devices from your interaction above that convey the speaker’s complex attitude toward desire. Identify the device and explain how each is connected to the speaker’s attitude.

Line 1	“blind man’s mark”	Paradox—target is wanted but impossible to attain
Line 1	“fool’s self-chosen snare”	Alliteration—the trap is admittedly self-inflicted; recognizes flaw; self-deprecating
Line 2	“fond fancy’s” “scum,” “dregs,” “scattered”	Alliteration juxtaposed with negatively connotative words—shows two sides
Line 3	“Band of all evils”	
Line 3	“cradle of causeless care”	Alliteration—harsh “K” sound effect?
Line 4	“web of will”	
Line 5	“Desire, desire!”	
Line 6		
Line 7		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line ____		
Line 14	<i>“Desiring naught but to kill desire.”</i>	
What poetic devices are most effective?		
What is revealed about the speaker’s attitude?		

V. Composing the Thesis and Introduction

An effective thesis statement states the assertions and writer’s opinion, which will be supported in the essay. It answers the question of the prompt and provides a road map or outline as to what will be in the essay

The thesis contains assertions, and the rest of the essay explains/defends/proves the assertions with evidence from the literature.

The following is a frame statement to assist in forming the thesis statement. The thesis statement becomes the key element of the intro-thesis paragraph and may consist of more than one sentence. Everything in it should be inextricably tied to, should apply to, and should lead to the thesis for the prompt. It is also an excellent opportunity to create a first impression of writing maturity and style.

In _____, _____
(title) (author)

utilizes/employs _____
(literary device)

and _____
(literary device)

to depict the speaker’s _____ attitude toward desire.
(description of this attitude)

Desire is portrayed as _____
(specific traits)

through the author’s use of _____ that create an
(poetic devices)

effect of _____
(short description of what they are arguing about and the result)

Other information may be added to the intro-thesis paragraph: struggle between virtue and vice (desire), the self-deprecating nature of the speaker’s attitude toward himself as he realizes he was caught up in his obsession to achieve his target goal, the poetic devices that contribute to illustrating the speaker’s complex attitude toward desire. The key is that each bit of information contributes to answering the prompt—no “fluff-stuff” for the strong intro-thesis paragraph.

VI. Composing the Essay

Whatever the organizational pattern for the essay, paragraphs should be unified around a main point or topic. The sentences in the paragraph should relate to that topic. Each paragraph should, in turn, support and relate to the thesis. A well-developed paragraph will have a topic sentence with evidence and commentary to support the main point of that paragraph.

The following is a frame for a typical, sub-topic body paragraph. The more sophisticated writers will blend evidence and commentary as well as vary the pattern of the paragraph. **While the following may seem formulaic, students who need a fundamental framework for developing ideas may benefit from the structure.** More advanced students may see the development of ideas in other formats.

TS _____

- **Evidence** _____

 ○ **Commentary** _____

- **Evidence** _____

 ○ **Commentary** _____

- **Evidence** _____

 ○ **Commentary** _____

CS _____

TS = topic sentence CS = concluding sentence

VII. Concluding the Essay

Though it is not required, a sound conclusion can add to the development of the essay. It is the writer's last chance to make an insightful comment and leave the reader of the essay with a positive impression.

- Refer to the main aspect of how complex the speaker's attitude is toward the abstract concept of desire. Mention the devices and what they reveal, and do not simply parrot the prompt.
- Mention again the author. Remember that the author has created this speaker who is struggling with his own flaws. Think about the author's overall message.
- End with an insightful comment; if possible, come back to any technique employed in the introduction.

Based on question answers and graph information, compose the essay. Determine paragraph organization and provide evidence and insightful commentary as support.

VIII. Evaluating Your Essay

The following is a checklist to be completed in evaluating the essay.

√	Items About Organization and Support
	I included vital information in the introduction, including the title, author, and important elements of the prompt.
	I composed a clear thesis statement that effectively answers the prompt; standing alone, it reveals understanding of the prompt and the passage.
	My thesis statement indicates how the author uses poetic devices to portray the speaker's complex attitude towards desire. These points will be explained in the body paragraphs.
	For each body paragraph, I wrote a strong topic sentence that ties directly to the prompt. It introduces the paragraph rather than just starting the paragraph with evidence.
	I included textual evidence to support assertions about the speaker's attitude and how it would be viewed as complex.
	I explained through commentary how this evidence is relevant to and supports the assertion of my thesis and, in turn, the prompt.
	I have a conclusion sentence for each body paragraph that brings the paragraph back to the main point of the topic sentence.
	I have a conclusion paragraph that refers to the thesis and re-emphasizes the most important points brought out in the essay.
	I have included evidence presented by the speaker that illustrates the internal conflict of the speaker during his retrospective view of the effects of desire on his life.
	I made an insightful comment about the speaker or author that relates to some aspect of the prompt.
	I mentioned the author again to give credit for the creation of the speaker, the poetic devices employed, and their effects on the meaning of the poem as a whole.
√	Items About General Aspects of the Essay
	I used quotation marks around the name of a poem, and I have put quotation marks around textual evidence used in the essay.
	I checked spellings for any information given: author name, archaic terms, and poetic devices.
	I employed sentence variety in structures and patterns, using proper punctuation for any combinations of patterns and structures.
	I checked my sentence beginnings to be sure I have variety in how sentences start so as not to have the same pattern over and over.
	I demonstrated upper level and mature word choice in my writing and used diction appropriate for analysis of literary elements and devices.
	I showed stylistic maturity by using a variety of punctuations: colon, semi-colon, dash, or brackets within a quotation.
	I used quotation marks (if applicable) correctly around the evidence presented in the body paragraphs and placed the comma or period inside the quotation marks.
	I wrote in present tense for literary analysis. I used vivid verbs where needed to specifically express what the author does in the text.

Extension Activity

Students often need more practice with sonnets as well as comparing and contrasting two poems. This extension activity pairs Sir Philip Sidney’s poem from the 2012 AP Literature exam with William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129 as a means to provide additional practice with sonnets and poetry analysis.

Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action; and till action, lust
 Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
 5 Enjoy’d no sooner but despised straight;
 Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
 Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
 10 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
 A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
 Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
 All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Annotation Practice: Interact with the poem.

- A. Highlight the archaic language.
- B. Highlight words with strong connotative meanings.
- C. Draw a line where you see a narrative shift in the poem. Justify your selection by annotating the poem with a brief explanation.
- D. Circle any words that are repeated.
- E. Underline the beginning letters of words used in alliteration.
- F. Mark the rhyme scheme of the poem.
- G. What syntactical anomalies do you notice about this poem? How does the syntax affect the poem’s overall meaning?
- H. Based on the highlighting, circling, and underlining, can you make any overall observations about the poem?

Analysis Practice: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. What topic is the focus of this poem? _____

2. What is the structure of the poem? How does it affect the overall meaning? _____

3. How are Shakespeare's and Sidney's poems similar? _____

4. How are Shakespeare's and Sidney's poems different? _____

5. What is the tone of Shakespeare's poem? _____

6. How does the speaker's point of view in each poem affect the tone? _____

7. How are the themes of the two poems similar? Different? _____

8. What general observations can you make about a sonnet? _____
