

Poetry Responses

General Feedback

1 – 1 ½ pages using 11- to 12-point font and single-spacing

THEME/INTRODUCTION:

Answer the question: “So what?” when re-reading your thematic statement.

Eliminate the “I think”s, “in my opinion”s, “I believe”s, etc.

Don’t tell me that the author made a point or had a message; tell me what it is in one statement.

Not an opportunity for **plot summary**

Do not make **unfounded claims** – in other words, will you prove what you claim is to be found in the poem? Students often seem to like to fill in gaps in a narrative, but too much filler without any evidence leaves the analysis empty.

Make sure your statement is **deep**. If it is too obvious (from life) or too simple, it affords less opportunities for discussion.

While striving to provide complexity, don’t confuse and/or frustrate your audience. (If you intend to begin this way—as you might be imitating the author—you must provide some key to your meaning with devices used in your statement.)

Take a stance; have a **strong opinion** about the message.

Advanced introductions zoom out to show an overview of **the trail of devices** used by the reader to decipher and deduce the larger meaning. It should have a balance of devices and meaning. **Each device introduced must be discussed in the body.**

Advanced introductions also include brief citations—typically woven into your own words yet identified by being enclosed in quotation marks—relating to the strongest device(s) and the theme you have identified.

Take opportunities to weave the author’s diction—where impactful and in direct quotes—into your own writing. (You can/should do this in any/every section of your discussion. If you are using the author’s word[s], **always** use quotation marks.)

DISCUSSION:

Slow down! If the device(s) in a section are truly worth discussing, it should take a great deal of space to do so. **Choose complex sections, fully dissect it, and reveal the impact on the theme you have uncovered.**

Be precise. Exactly how did you arrive at a conclusion about the text? **Don't jump to conclusions without showing your steps.** While looking for your logic, I fall into the gaps you've left.

Don't feel compelled to literally define a device. This gives the reader the notion that you lack confidence. Use the definition to identify it, but spend time and space **showing the effects of the particular example.**

Don't just mention literary devices in passing; it's like name-dropping: There's no substance to your knowledge. **SHOW IMPACT!**

Every section of your discussion has the main purpose of **revealing the process** through which you engaged to arrive at your identified theme.

A loss of focus is potentially fatal.

Make connections within your discussion (between items being compared) clear; leave no room for error on the part of your reader; take the figurative and explain it literally.

Watch your own use of **repetition**: is it simply **redundancy**? Look to revise your transitions to be concise.

Consider chunking your evidence. This is a great way to be certain no opportunities were lost. Oftentimes, in analyses, writers take the audience only to the edge of the real impact. Take me over the precipice and I will proudly offer full credit.

Directly citing poetry requires the following **format** when there is a **line break** amid the evidence: "...their doggy life and the torturer's **horse/Scratches** its innocent behind on a tree" (Auden).

CONNECTIONS:

Stay focused. The theme you identified and documented should be ubiquitously in your essay.

Thematic statements should be varied and engaging.

Each chunk of evidence should culminate in an opportunity to restate the theme with specifics from the literary device(s) explored.

MAKE IT PERSONAL!

- If you do, it is more likely that the theme you are examining and argument in support of it will naturally be more compelling.
- If you fail to personally connect to a work of art, arguably, you are faking your analysis.
- Feel free to connect to ANYTHING, but do not leave yourself out of it.

❖ **Of course, do not include your personal connections in your essays for the AP Lit exam, even though you should have consciously made the connections, hopefully by that point, naturally.**