

Paper on Form

Basic Assignment. Select one of the following poems.

Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* #52, 216-17
Shakespeare, Sonnet 129, 267
Dickinson, 620 (435), 1121
Dunbar, "Sympathy," 1224
Roethke, "Elegy for Jane," 1499

Bishop, "One Art," 1527-28
Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays," 1533
Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa," 1820
Komunyakaa, "Sunday Afternoons," 1951-52
Duffy, "Warming Her Pearls," 2007

Write a 3-5 page paper that provides a specific explanation of the relationship between the poem's meaning and its form. Your task is to write a paper that discusses some of the poem's formal elements—its rhythms, rhymes and sounds, tone, diction, structure and organization, figurative language, and so on—in relation to the poem's meaning and your understanding of the poem as a whole).

Key Dates to Note

Sept 28 W Bring to class a one-paragraph, typed description of your paper idea.
Oct 7 F **Paper on form is due.**

Explanation of What-I'm-Really-Looking-For

The purpose of this assignment is two-fold. First, it is an exercise designed to help you teach yourself how a poem's meaning and its form are related. Second, this writing assignment provides you with an opportunity to articulate and defend *your* own interpretation of a poem.

In other words, I will not read your papers to see if you came up with the poem's 'one true' meaning. Instead, I will be looking for three things:

1. Can you discuss the connection between the poem's meaning and its form?
2. Can you explain in a clear and persuasive manner your interpretation of the poem?
3. Can you support your interpretation with well-chosen direct references to the poem itself?

Some Questions to Get You Started

After you've read and re-read your poem carefully, try asking yourselves these questions:

1. Think about the formal elements of poetry: persona, tone, diction, connotation, rhythm and meter, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, verse form (like sonnet, villanelle, ode, etc.), figurative language, metaphor, metonymy, personification, irony, and so on. Do any of these elements reinforce the poem's meaning? If so, *how* do these formal features reinforce the poem's meaning?
2. How are (any of) these elements related to the poem as a whole? What is the poem's primary organizing principle? How is the poem structured? Is it a unified poem or a fragmented one?
3. What issues or questions does the poem raise? Does the poem's structure or formal features resolve any of those issues?
4. Are there any tensions or contradictions between *what* the poem says and *how* the poem says it? If so, how would you explain that tension or contradiction?

Writing Advice

You will want to start by reading and re-reading your poem carefully. Read it several times. Read it aloud. Take notes on it. Take notes that summarize the gist of each stanza.

You don't have to time to write about every formal feature of the poem; so you'll need to focus your attention. Choose carefully those formal elements that you do write about. Develop a thesis, a central claim, around which you can structure your discussion. Decide what you want your audience to know about the poem. Think of everyone in this classroom as your audience. Think about how to persuade them to see the poem and its form the way that you do. Then organize your discussion of the poem accordingly.

Plan to compose a rough draft and to revise, revise, revise. Write clearly. Edit and proofread carefully. Argue your case convincingly by supplying well-chosen examples accompanied by clear, persuasive, reasoned analysis. Supply a title that indicates what your essay is about. Above all, enjoy the poem you choose.

Help!

At http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_lit.html (I'll post this link to our course website), you can find some online help for writing about literature. You can find a copy of this assignment and our other course materials at our course website: <http://www.k-state.edu/english/eiselei/engl340/index.html>. As always, you are welcome to drop by my office (ECS 108C) to talk about your paper. I have office hours for this class on Mondays and Fridays at 10:30 and Thursdays from 9:00 to 10:30, but I am easy to reach at other times as well. If my office hours are not convenient for you, lets set up an appointment.

Technical Information

Type and double-space your paper. Put your name, the course name/number, the assignment name/number, and the date in the upper left hand corner of your paper. When quoting poetry, reproduce the lines exactly as the poet arranged them. Indicate the end of the printed line of poetry with a spaced slash [/]. For example: "There she stands / As if alive" (lines 46-47). When quoting more than two or three lines, set off the quotation by indentation; quotation marks are not necessary in block quotations. For example:

The Soul selects her own Society--

Then--shuts the Door--

To her divine Majority--

(lines 1-3)

As in the example above, use line numbers to indicate from where in the poem you've taken the quotation. For this assignment, there is no need to cite page numbers or the anthology title. I will simply assume that you are using the poem as printed in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th edition. **This assignment requires neither research at the library nor consultation of any poetry criticism.** Nevertheless, if you do use the ideas or interpretations or insights of another reader or critic in your paper, make certain you acknowledge precisely where you got those ideas or interpretations or insights. Use the format outlined by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th edition, by Joseph Gibaldi. You can find this book at the K-Sate Union or the library; the library also provides a single sheet handout that explains the MLA format for citation of work by others.