

Poetry Explication Essay

Value: 100 points (90 for the final draft & 10 for the rough draft/peer review along with the right to revise the essay, if desired)

Format: Typed, MLA style

Length: at least 1,000 words **and** at least 5 paragraphs, no more than 20% quotations and NO PLAGIARISM.

Due Dates:

Rough Draft: The rough draft is expected to be typed, double-spaced, MLA-formatted, and at least 750 words and 5 paragraphs **submitted to Turnitin by 11:59pm on the due date**. No late rough drafts are accepted.

Peer Review is done in *Turnitin* and cannot be submitted late or made up if missed. Only students who submit a rough draft to *Turnitin* by the deadline will be able to participate in peer review. **Peer Review is due by 11:59pm on the due date.**

Final Draft: Submit the final draft of your poetry explication essay (as a Single File Upload) to *Turnitin* by **11:59pm on the due date**.

Directions: Write an essay explicating **one** of the poems listed below, identifying, presenting, proving, and analyzing its argument about human existence or human nature.

- Lucille Clifton’s “sorrows”
- Langston Hughes’ “Harlem”
- Philip Levine’s “They Feed They Lion”
- Deborah Pope’s “Getting Through”
- Katharyn Machan’s “Hazel Tells LaVerne”
- W. H. Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts”

How to Explicate a Poem

Explication unfolds the meaning or argument of a poem from beginning to end, relevant part by relevant part whether that means word by word, line by line, image by image, etc.

Explication is concerned **ONLY** with what is in the poem, not the poet's life or times and not your own experiences or your feelings on the topic or your opinion on the poem or topic.

Explication is not the same as paraphrase (rewording). Explication goes further than rewording; explication unfolds or reveals what a poem means by pointing out and explaining how and why it expresses that meaning or argument in its choices in style, structure, and content.

PARAGRAPH #1: INTRODUCTION

Step 1: Identify the author, title, and topic of the poem in the first sentence of your introduction.

Step 2: Start at the beginning of the poem and explain how its title or opening introduces or addresses the topic. And/Or identify and discuss the main literary device or devices used to communicate this topic throughout the poem.

Step 3: End Paragraph #1 with your claim, which should identify the poem's thesis (**one** main argument about its topic).

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

Step 1: Start with a Reason (the next point the next part of the poem makes about its topic and proving its claim).

Step 2: Walk us through this part of the poem explicating it (unfolding and explaining how it means what the reason says it does).

Step 3: End the paragraph by connecting back to and developing your claim.

Note: Just saying "this shows the human tendency to X is vague and doesn't in fact show, prove, or develop anything. Explain how and why it does.

CONCLUSION :

The essay is not complete without a conclusion.

Step 1: Remind us of the claim, but do not just copy/paste the same sentence. For example: By compelling us to identify with the villagers, Jackson is revealing her purpose, which is dependent upon us to fulfill.

Step 2: Develop the claim. (Think of this step as asking yourself and answering the question **SO WHAT?** Consider the implications, importance, and purpose of this argument.) For example: It is clear the villagers have not changed. Only Tessie undergoes a change, which comes too late for the villagers to hear. But we do hear it. . . Etc.

Step 3: Draw the paper to a close. End with a strong last sentence and word.

Note: Do not repeat the reasons or evidence in the conclusion. Don't end paragraphs with a quotation. Explain their meaning. Connect back to the claim.

TIPS:

- Don't begin or end paragraphs with a quotation. Introduce and explain them.
- Try to avoid an approach which simply states "In line one . . . , In the second line . . . ,In the third line," etc.
- Repeat the Body Paragraphs until you come to the end of the poem.
- Proofread and edit, especially quotations.
- In-text citation should include the line numbers rather than the page numbers.

Refer to the Sample Explication of a Poem in (new improved version can be found in Canvas inside the Reference Materials Module)