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*Note: The materials presented here borrow from a number of sources, most notably the Seventh Edition of Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense. The volume was edited by Thomas R. Arp. This is a fabulous resource, and, if you're lucky enough to come across a copy at a library or elsewhere, I'd encourage you to spend some quality time with it.*

## 1. The Powwow at the End of the World

*Sherman Alexie*

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall  
after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam  
and topples it. I am told by many of you that I must forgive  
and so I shall after the floodwaters burst each successive dam  
downriver from the Grand Coulee. I am told by many of you  
that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters find  
their way to the mouth of the Columbia River as it enters the Pacific  
and causes all of it to rise. I am told by many of you that I must forgive  
and so I shall after the first drop of floodwater is swallowed by that salmon  
waiting in the Pacific. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall  
after that salmon swims upstream, through the mouth of the Columbia  
and then past the flooded cities, broken dams and abandoned reactors  
of Hanford. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall  
after that salmon swims through the mouth of the Spokane River  
as it meets the Columbia, then upstream, until it arrives  
in the shallows of a secret bay on the reservation where I wait alone.  
I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after  
that salmon leaps into the night air above the water, throws  
a lightning bolt at the brush near my feet, and starts the fire  
which will lead all of the lost Indians home. I am told  
by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall  
after we Indians have gathered around the fire with that salmon  
who has three stories it must tell before sunrise: one story will teach us  
how to pray; another story will make us laugh for hours;  
the third story will give us reason to dance. I am told by many  
of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing  
with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world.

### *Questions:*

1. Who is the speaker? What is the situation?
2. Who is being addressed?
3. What is the speaker's attitude toward the repeated requirements that he must forgive?

## 2. There's been a death in the opposite house

*Emily Dickinson*

There's been a death in the opposite house  
As lately as today.  
I know it by the numb look  
Such houses have always.

The neighbors rustle in and out,  
The doctor drives away.  
A window opens like a pod,  
Abrupt, mechanically;

Somebody flings a mattress out—  
The children hurry by;  
They wonder if it died on that—  
I used to when a boy.

The minister goes stiffly in  
As if the house were his,  
And he owned all the mourners now,

And little boys besides;

And then the milliner, and the man  
Of the appalling trade,  
To take the measure of the house

There'll be that dark parade

Of tassels and of coaches soon.  
It's as easy as a sign,  
The intuition of the news  
In just a country town.

*Questions:*

1. What can we know about the speaker in the poem?
2. By what signs does the speaker "intuit" that a death has occurred? Explain them stanza by stanza.
3. What is the speaker's attitude toward death?

### 3. A Study of Reading Habits

*Philip Larkin*

When getting my nose in a book  
cured most things short of school,  
It was worth ruining my eyes  
to know I could still keep cool,  
And deal out the old right hook  
To dirty dogs twice my size.

Later, with inch-thick specs,  
Evil was just my lark:  
Me and my cloak and fangs  
Had ripping ties in the dark.  
The women I clubbed with sex!  
I broke them up like meringues.

Don't read much now: the dude  
Who lets the girl down before  
The hero arrives, the chap  
Who's yellow and keeps the store,  
Seem far too familiar. Get stewed:  
Books are a load of crap.

*Questions:*

1. The three stanzas delineate three stages in the speaker's life. Describe each.
2. What kind of person is the speaker? What kinds of books does he read?
3. May we assume that the speaker and the poet are the same person? Why or why not?

### 4. Break of Day

*John Donne*

'Tis true, 'tis day; what though it be?  
Oh, wilt thou therefore rise from me?  
Why should we rise because 'tis light?  
Did we lie down because 'twas night?  
Love which in spite of darkness brought us hither  
Should, in despite of light, keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;  
If it could speak as well as spy,  
this were the worst that it could say:  
that, being well, I fain would stay,  
And that I loved my heart and honor so,  
That I could not from him that had them go.

Must business thee from hence remove?  
Oh, that's the worst disease of love;  
The poor, the foul, the false, love can  
Admit, but not the busied man.  
He which hath business and makes love, doth do  
Such wrong as when a married man doth woo.

#### *Questions*

1. Who is the speaker? Who is addressed? What is the situation? Can the speaker be identified with the poet?
2. Explain the comparison in line 7. To whom does "I" (10-12) refer? Is "Love" the subject or object of "can admit"?
3. Summarize the arguments used by the speaker to keep the person addressed from leaving. What is the speaker's scale of value?
4. Are the two persons married or unmarried? Justify your answer.

### **5. Mirror**

*Sylvia Plath*

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see I swallow immediately  
just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful—  
the eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

#### *Questions*

1. Who is the speaker? What is the central purpose of the poem, and by what means is it achieved?
2. In what ways is the mirror like and unlike a person (stanza 1)? In what ways is it like a lake (stanza 2)?
3. What is the meaning of the last two lines?

### **6. When my love swears that she is made of truth**

*William Shakespeare*

When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her, though I know she lies,  
That she might think me some untutored youth,  
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.

Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
 Although she knows my days are past the best,  
 Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;  
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.  
 but wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
 Oh, love's best habit is in seeming trust,  
 And age in love loves not to have years told:  
 Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
 And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

*Questions*

1. How old is the speaker? How old is his beloved? What is the nature of their relationship?
2. How is the contradiction in line 2 to be resolved? In lines 5-6? Who is lying to whom?
3. How do "simply" and "simple" (8) differ in meaning?
4. What is the tone of this poem – that is, the attitude of the speaker toward his situation? Should line 11 be taken as an expression of (a) wisdom, (b) conscious rationalization, or (c) self-deception? In answering these questions, consider both the situation and the connotations of the key words throughout the poem.

**7. Blackberry-picking**

*Seamus Heaney*

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
 For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
 At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
 Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
 You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
 Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
 Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
 Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
 Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
 Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
 Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
 We trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
 Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
 With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
 Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
 With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
 But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
 A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
 The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
 The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
 I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
 That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
 Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

*Questions*

1. Especially in the first stanza, this poem contains diction likening the blackberries to what? List the words that support your assertion.
2. The tone shifts dramatically in the second stanza; describe this new tone and then tell how the tone you have identified is supported by the connotations of the words in this section of the poem.

## 8. Cross

*Langston Hughes*

My old man's a white old man  
And my old mother's black.  
If ever I cursed my white old man  
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother  
And wished she were in hell,  
I'm sorry for that evil wish  
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I'm gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black.

### *Questions*

1. What different denotations does the title have? What connotations are linked to each of them?
2. The language in this poem, such as "old man" (1, 3, 9), "ma" (10), and "gonna" (11) is plain, and even colloquial. Is it appropriate to the subject? Why or why not?

## 9. The Naming of Parts

*Henry Reed*

Today we have the naming of parts. Yesterday  
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,  
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,  
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica  
Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens,  
And today we have the naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this  
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,  
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,  
Which in your case you have not got. The branches  
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,  
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released  
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me  
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy  
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms  
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see  
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this  
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it  
Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this  
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards  
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:  
They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy  
If you have at strength in your thumb: like the bolt,  
And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance,

Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom  
Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards,  
For today we have the naming of parts.

### *Questions*

1. Who is the speaker (or speakers) in the poem, and what is the situation?
2. What basic contrasts are represented by the trainees and the gardens?
3. What is it that trainees “have not got” (28)? What different meanings have the phrases “easing the spring” (22) and “point of balance” (27)?
4. What differences in language and rhythm do you find between the lines that involve the “naming of parts” and those that describe the gardens?
5. Does the repetition of certain phrases throughout the poem have any special function? What does it accomplish?
6. What statement does the poem make about war as it affects men and their lives?

### **10. Birches**

*Robert Frost*

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,



Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
 So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
 And so I dream of going back to be.  
 It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
 And life is too much like a pathless wood  
 Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
 And then come back to it and begin over.  
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
*Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
 But dipped its top and set me down again.  
 That would be good both going and coming back.  
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

### *Questions*

1. List at least three examples of figurative language (i.e. simile, metaphor, personification).
2. Only one word in this poem is in italics. Why do you think that the author chose to italicize this word? What is its significance in the meaning of the poem as a whole?
3. Discuss the use of imagery in this poem. To which sense do you believe this poem most appeals? Back up your answer with evidence from the text.

### **11. Flirtation**

*Rita Dove*

After all, there's no need  
to say anything

at first. An orange, peeled  
and quartered, flares

like a tulip on a wedgewood plate  
Anything can happen.

Outside the sun  
has rolled up her rugs

and night strewn salt  
across the sky. My heart

is humming a tune  
I haven't heard in years!

Quiet's cool flesh—  
let's sniff and eat it.

There are ways  
to make of the moment

a topiary  
so the pleasure's in

walking through.

*Questions*

1. In your own words, explain the image presented in the second and third stanzas.
2. Does the content of this poem match up with the images and ideas presented in the poem? Explain your answer with evidence from the text.

**12. Spring**

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

Nothing is so beautiful as spring—

    When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
    Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;  
    The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush  
    The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush  
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?

    A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning  
In Eden garden. —Have, get, before it cloy,

    Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,  
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,  
    Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

*Questions*

1. The first line makes an abstract statement. How is this statement brought to carry conviction?
2. The sky is described as being “all in a rush / With richness” (7-8). In what other respects is this poem “rich”?
3. To what two things does the speaker compare the spring in lines 9-14? In what ways are the comparisons appropriate?
4. Lines 11-14 might be made clearer by paraphrasing them thus: “Christ, lord, child of the virgin: save the innocent mind of a girl and boy before sin taints it, since it is most like yours and worth saving.” Why are Hopkins' lines more effective, both in imagery and in syntax?

**13. This Is Just To Say**

*William Carlos Williams*

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

*Questions*

1. Who is the speaker in this poem? Can we say that the speaker and the author are the same person?

2. Where might one find these words written in everyday life?
3. William Carlos Williams, the author of this poem, subscribed to a modern view of poetry known as imagism. Williams believed that, rather than focusing on conveying ideas and deeper truths, a poet's job was to create a powerful and concise sensory experience for the reader through one's writings. Does he live up to this task in this poem?

#### 14. Harlem

*Langston Hughes*

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

#### *Questions*

1. This poem offers any number of rhetorical questions – questions posed with no reasonable expectation of being answered. Do you think the reader gets any answers to the initial question? Explain your answer?
2. Of the six images, five are similes. Which is a metaphor? Comment on its position and its effectiveness.
3. Since the dream could be any dream, the poem is general in its implication. What happens to your understanding of it on learning that its author was a black American?

#### 15. Metaphors

*Sylvia Plath*

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils,  
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

#### *Questions*

1. Like its first metaphor, this poem is a riddle to be solved by identifying the literal terms of its metaphors. after you have identified the speaker ("riddle," "elephant," "house," "melon," "stage," "cow"), identify the literal meanings of the related metaphors ("syllables," "tendrils," "fruit," "ivory," "timbers," "loaf," "yeasty rising," "money," "purse," "train").
2. How do you interpret line 9?
3. How does the form of the poem relate to its content?
4. Is this poem a complaint? Explain your answer.

#### 16. A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

*John Donne*

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
While some of their sad friends do say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, no.

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did and meant  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
That ourselves know not what it is  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul be fixed foot, makes now show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam  
It leans, and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end, where I begun.

Note: Line 11 is a reference to the spheres of Ptolemaic cosmology, whose movements caused no such disturbance as does a movement of the earth – that is, an earthquake.

### *Questions*

1. Is the speaker in the poem about to die? Or about to leave on a journey? (The answer may be found in careful analysis of the simile in the last three stanzas and by noticing that the idea of dying in stanza 1 is introduced in a simile.)
2. Find and explain three similes and one metaphor used to describe the parting of true lovers.
3. The figure in the last three stanzas is one of the most famous in English literature. Demonstrate its appropriateness by obtaining two pencils to imitate the two legs.

### 17. Song: Go, lovely rose!

*Edmund Waller*

Go, lovely rose!  
Tell her that wastes her time and me  
That now she knows,  
When I resemble her to thee,  
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young  
And shuns to have her graces spied  
That hadst thou sprung  
In deserts where no men abide,  
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth  
Of beauty from the light retired.  
Bid her come forth,  
Suffer herself to be desired  
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die! that she  
The common fate of all things rare  
May read in thee,  
How small a part of time they share  
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

#### *Questions*

1. The speaker addresses a rose, but his message is to a beautiful young woman. How might this indirect means of speaking to her increase the effect of his message? What is he asking her to do? What part does "time" play in this poem?
2. Rather than using apostrophe to compare his love to a rose, the speaker might have addressed her directly, making the comparison in a simile or a metaphor ("you are like a rose" or "you are a rose"), or he might have used an abstract third-person form ("she is like a rose" or "she is a rose"). What does this poem gain from apostrophe?

### 18. The Road Not Taken

*Robert Frost*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

*Questions*

1. Does the speaker feel that he has made the wrong choice in taking the road “less traveled by” (19)? If not, why will he “sigh” (16)? What does he regret?
2. Why will a choice between two roads that seem very much alike make such a big difference many years later?
3. Do you think that this event literally happened to the speaker, or that he is reflecting on an analogous decision he once faced? Explain your answer.

**19. A Noiseless Patient Spider**

*Walt Whitman*

A noiseless patient spider,  
I marked where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Marked how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,  
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you need will be formed, till the ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

*Questions*

1. In this poem, why is Whitman’s comparison – of his soul to the spider – considered to be a symbol and not a simile or a metaphor?
2. In what ways are the spider and the soul contrasted? What do the contrasts contribute to the meaning of the symbol?
3. Can the questing soul represent human actions other than the search for spiritual certainties?

**20. The Sick Rose**

*William Blake*

O Rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

*Questions*

1. In your interpretation, what is the symbolic meaning of the rose? Of the worm? Explain your answer by referencing the text.
2. Should symbolic meanings be found for the night and the storm? If so, what meanings would you suggest? If not, explain your reasoning.

## 21. Our journey had advanced

*Emily Dickinson*

Our journey had advanced.  
Our feet were almost come  
To that odd fork in Being's road  
"Eternity" by term.

Our pace took sudden awe.  
Our feet reluctant led.  
Before were cities, but between  
The forest of the dead.

Retreat was out of hope,  
Behind, a sealed route,  
"Eternity's" white flag before,  
And God at every gate.

### *Questions*

1. Identify the "journey" (1), the "road" (3), the "forest" (8), and the speaker's destination in this allegory. What literal human experience is the subject of this poem?
2. Explain the implications of the plural forms: "Our" (1-2, 5-6), "cities" (7), and "every gate" (12).
3. What is the underlying metaphor implied in the last stanza by "Retreat" (9), "flag" (11), "gate" (12)? Does the "white flag" signify surrender?

## 22. Much madness is divinest sense

*Emily Dickinson*

Much madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye,  
Much sense, the starkest madness.  
'Tis the majority  
In this, as all, prevail:  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur, you're straightaway dangerous  
And handled with a chain.

### *Questions*

1. This poem presents the two sides of a paradoxical proposition: that insanity is good sense, and that good sense is insane. How do the concepts implied by the words "discerning" (2) and "majority" (4) provide the resolution of this paradox?
2. How do we know that the speaker does not believe that the majority is correct? How do the last five lines extend the subject beyond a contrast between sanity and insanity?

## 23. The Sun Rising

*John Donne*

Busy old fool, unruly sun,  
Why dost thou thus  
Through windows and through curtains call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?  
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide  
Late schoolboys and sour 'prentices,  
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,  
Call country ants to harvest offices;  
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,  
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend and strong  
 Why shouldst thou think?  
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,  
 But that I would not lose her sight so long;  
     If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
     Look, and tomorrow late tell me  
     Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine  
     Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.  
 Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
 And thou shalt hear, "all here in one bed lay."

    She's all states, and all princes I;  
     Nothing else is.  
 Princes do but play us, compared with this,  
 All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
     Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,  
     In that the world's contracted thus;  
     Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
     To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
 Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
 This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.

*Questions*

1. As precisely as possible, identify the time of day and the locale. What three "persons" does the poem involve?
2. What is the speaker's attitude toward the sun in stanzas 1 and 2? How and why does it change in stanza 3?
3. Does the speaker understate or overstate the actual qualities of the sun? Point out specific examples. What does the under / overstatement accomplish?
4. Who is actually the intended listener for this intended apostrophe? What is the speaker's purpose? What is the poem's purpose?

**24. Incident**

*Countee Cullen*

Once riding in old Baltimore  
     Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
 I saw a Baltimorean  
     Keep looking straight at me.  
  
 Now I was eight and very small,  
     And he was no whit bigger,  
 And so I smiled, but he poked out  
     His tongue, and called me "Nigger."  
  
 I saw the whole of Baltimore  
     From May until December;  
 Of all the things that happened there  
     That's all that I remember.

*Questions*

1. What accounts for the effectiveness of the last stanza?
2. Comment on the title. Does it match up with the subject of the poem?
3. Does the last stanza understate or overstate Cullen's reaction? Explain your answer with evidence.



## 25. One Perfect Rose

*Dorothy Parker*

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.  
All tenderly his messenger he chose;  
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet—  
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;  
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."  
Love long has taken for his amulet  
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet  
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?  
Ah now, it's always just my luck to get  
One perfect rose.

### *Questions*

1. Comment on the contrast in diction between stanzas 1-2 and 3.
2. At what or whom is this satire directed? For a bit of assistance, see "Song: Go, lovely rose!" (No. 17)

## 26. Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

*Adrienne Rich*

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,  
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.  
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool  
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.  
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band  
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

### *Questions*

1. The tone of this poem shifts dramatically from stanza to stanza. Identify a tone for each stanza, and then back up the tone you identify with specific words and details that prove your point.
2. Contrast the characteristics of the tigers with those ascribed to Aunt Jennifer. What does the contrast between the two for the poem as a whole?

## 27. Woman Work

*Maya Angelou*

I've got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
Then the chicken to fry  
The baby to dry  
I got company to feed

The garden to weed  
I've got the shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The cane to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick.

Shine on me, sunshine  
Rain on me, rain  
Fall softly, dewdrops  
And cool my brow again.

Storm, low me from here  
With your fiercest wind  
Let me float across the sky  
'Til I can rest again.

Fall gently, snowflakes  
Cover me with white  
Cold icy kisses and  
Let me rest tonight.

Sun, rain, curving sky  
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone  
Star shine, moon glow  
You're all that I can call my own.

#### *Questions*

1. What can we infer about the speaker of the poem? How old is she? What time is she living in? What is her life like?
2. The language used in this poem is notable due to its stark simplicity. Does the poet effectively convey emotion in spite of the poem's simplicity? What emotions are conveyed? Explain your answer with evidence from the text.

### **28. Digging**

*Seamus Heaney*

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against his inside knee was levered firmly  
He hooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.

Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

Note: In Ireland, "turf" (17) is a block of peat dug from a bog; when dried, it is used as fuel.

#### *Questions*

1. In your own words, express the author's tone throughout this poem. What is his attitude toward his ancestors?
2. What emotional responses are evoked by the imagery?
3. What poetic device is used in the last stanza? Explain your answer with support from the text?

### **29. God's Grandeur**

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

#### *Questions*

1. What is the theme of this sonnet?
2. The image in lines 3-4 possibly refers to olive oil being collected in great vats from crushed olives, but the image is much disputed. Explain the simile in line 2 and the symbols in lines 7-8 and 11-12.
3. Identify and note the line numbers that contain alliteration, assonance, consonance, and internal rhyme. Do these help convey the meaning?

### 30. That night when joy began

*W. H. Auden*

That night when joy began  
Our narrowest veins to flush,  
We waited for the flash  
Of morning's leveled gun.

But morning let us pass,  
And day by day relief  
Outgrows his nervous laugh,  
Grown credulous of peace,

As mile by mile is seen  
No trespasser's reproach,  
And love's best glasses reach  
No fields but are his own.

#### *Questions*

1. What has been the past experience of the two people in the poem? What is their present experience? What precisely is the tone of the poem?
2. What basic metaphor underlies this poem? Work it out stanza by stanza.
3. Does line 10 mean that no trespasser reproaches the lovers or that no one reproaches the lovers for being trespassers?
4. The rhyme pattern in this poem is intricate and exact. Work it out, considering alliteration, assonance, and consonance. Mark examples of each on your poem, and write out the rhyme scheme and other notable musical techniques used in the poem on your answer sheet.

### 31. We Wear the Mask

*Paul Laurence Dunbar*

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
    We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
    We wear the mask!

#### *Questions*

1. Explain the extended metaphor explored throughout the poem? Based on this metaphor, what guesses can you make about the speaker's identity?
2. A refrain is a line or group of lines repeated throughout a poem. Write out the rhyme scheme of this poem, and then note how the refrain in this poem interrupts the rhyme scheme. What does this do to emphasize the theme of the poem?
3. Where do you see alliteration and assonance in the poem? Where do you see internal line rhyme?

### 32. Virtue

*George Herbert*

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky;  
The dew shall weep thy fall to night,  
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;  
Thy root is ever in its grave,  
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted lie;  
My music shows ye have your closes,  
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like a seasoned timber, never gives;  
But though the whole world would turn to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.

#### *Questions*

1. How are the four stanzas interconnected? How do they build to a climax?
2. How does the fourth stanza contrast with the first three?
3. What type of foot is most common throughout the poem? Where is the regular rhythmic pattern of this poem interrupted? Why do you think this might occur?

### 33. Because I could not stop for Death

*Emily Dickenson*

Because I could not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me;  
The carriage held but just ourselves  
And Immortality.

We slowly drove; he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For his civility.

We passed the school, where children strove,  
At recess, in the ring,  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun,

Or rather, he passed us;  
The dews drew quivering and chill;  
For only gossamer, my gown;  
My tippet, only tulle.

We paused before a house that seemed  
A swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible.  
The cornice, in the ground.

Since then, 'tis centuries, and yet  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.

#### *Questions*

1. What is the allegorical meaning of this ride?
2. Explain the irony of "kindly" and "civility" (8).
3. As what is death personified?
4. The fourth stanza alters the metrical pattern of the poem. What aspect of this hypothetical experience is emphasized by the alteration?

### **34. We Real Cool**

*Gwendolyn Brooks*

*The Pool Players.*

*Seven At The Golden Shovel.*

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk Late. We  
Strike Straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

1. This poem masterfully uses a technique called **enjambment**, in which an author intentionally ends a sentence in the middle of the line. Try reading this poem with the pronouns at the beginning of the lines instead of at the end. What is lost?
2. Is this poem dominated by double or triple meters? What type? In what lines does the poem stray from this metrical pattern?

### **35. Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night**

*Dylan Thomas*

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*Questions*

1. Scan the poem. What patterns emerge? Where does the poem stray from the basic patterns established?
2. This poem is an example of a French form of poetry known as a **villanelle**. Based on this poem, how would you tentatively define this form of poetry? What characteristics of this poetic form seem to be key?

**36. Mad Girl's Love Song**

*Sylvia Plath*

I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;  
I lift my lids and all is born again.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,  
And arbitrary blackness gallops in:  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed  
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:  
Exit seraphim and Satan's men:  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I fancied you'd return the way you said,  
But I grow old and I forget your name.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

I should have loved a thunderbird instead;  
At least when spring comes they roar back again.  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

*Questions*

1. Like poem 35, this is a villanelle. How does this villanelle change the definition you came up with for this form of poetry?
2. One key characteristic of villanelles is the repetition of last lines. How would the theme of this poem be different if these lines were not repeated at the ends of stanzas?
3. Explain the tone of this poem, and identify key textual features or poetic devices that support the tone you identify.

**37. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**

*William Shakespeare*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
 Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
     So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
     So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

*Questions*

1. State the rhyme scheme and the type of meter used in this poem.
2. What is the effect of the break in the rhyme scheme during the last two lines? What ideas are emphasized by this rhyming couplet?

**38. To the Mercy Killers**

*Dudley Randall*

If ever mercy move you murder me,  
 I pray you, kindly killers, let me live.  
 Never conspire with death to set me free,  
 but let me know such life as pain can give.  
 Even though I be a clot, an aching clench,  
 a stub, a stump, a butt, a scab, a knob,  
 a screaming pain, a putrefying stench,  
 still let me live, so long as life shall throb.  
 Even though I turn such traitor to myself  
 as beg to die, do not accomplice me.  
 Even though I seem not human, a mute shelf  
 of glucose, bottled blood, machinery  
 to swell the lung and pump the heart—even so,  
 do not put out my life. Let me still glow.

*Questions*

1. In form this is a Shakespearan sonnet, consisting of three quatrains and a concluding couplet (units of 4, 4, 4, and 2 lines each); but in structure (organization of thought) it follows the Italian model of an octave and a sestet (8- and 6-line units) in which the first eight lines introduce a thought and the sestet produces some kind of counterthought. What "turn" of thought occurs at the end of line 8 in this sonnet?
2. Identify the paradox in line 2 that introduces the central topic of the poem. (It is also stated in the title, but line 2 states it more effectively because of its alliteration.)
3. In what ways does this poem differ from the Shakespearean sonnet, above?

**39. When I have Fears That I May Cease to Be**

*John Keats*

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
     Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,  
 Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,  
     Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;  
 When I behold, upon the night's starred face,  
     Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
 And think that I may never live to trace  
     Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;  
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
     That I shall never look upon thee more,  
 Never have relish in the fairy power  
     Of unreflecting love—then on the shore  
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think



Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

*Questions*

1. State the rhyme scheme and the type of meter used in this poem.
2. How does the rhyme scheme at work in this poem change the feel of the text overall?
3. Based on the three different takes on the sonnet presented in poems 36-38, which form do you feel is most effective at effectively conveying theme? Explain your answer.

**40. Two Japanese Haiku**

The lightning flashes!  
And slashing through the darkness,  
A night-heron's screech.

A lightning gleam:  
into darkness travels  
a night heron's scream.  
- *Matsuo Basbo*

The falling flower  
I saw drift back to the branch  
Was a butterfly.

Fallen flowers rise  
back to the branch—I watch:  
oh... butterflies!  
- *Moritake*

*Question*

The **haiku**, a Japanese form, consists of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables each. The translators of the versions on the left (Earl Miner and Babette Deutsch respectively) preserve this syllable count; the translator of the right-hand versions (Harold G. Henderson) seeks to preserve the sense of formal structure by making the first and last lines rhyme. From these two examples, what would you say are the characteristics of effective haiku?

**41. The Red Wheelbarrow**

*William Carlos Williams*

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

*Questions*

1. This poem contains only 16 words. In spite of the poem's brevity, does it effectively express an image? Explain your answer and describe why you do or do not think this poem is successful.
2. William Carlos Williams ascribed to a school of thought which held that poetry's main purpose is to express an image, not to convey some deeper hidden meaning. Do you agree or disagree with this position? Explain your answer.



black men with outasight afros

*Questions*

1. This poem is written in a dialect, with words spelled the way that the speaker would pronounce them. How do the nontraditional spellings and diction alter the experience of reading this poem? How would the poem be different if the author had used academic English spelling and punctuation?
2. In a number of places the author of this poem repeats a word multiple times. Why might this be the case? Does this repetition sound natural or forced when read aloud?

**44. l(a**

*e. e. cummings*

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iness

*Questions*

1. Write the poem out on one line, adding spaces and punctuation where you believe appropriate. Does this change your understanding of the poem? What does the poem mean?
2. Why do you think the author chose to write the poem spread out over so many lines? What does this accomplish?
3. Would the poem retain its meaning if the parentheses were removed? Explain your answer.

**45. The Garden**

*Ezra Pound*

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall □  
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens, □  
And she is dying piece-meal □  
of a sort of emotional anemia.

□  
And round about there is a rabble □  
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor. □  
They shall inherit the earth. □

In her is the end of breeding. □  
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.

She would like some one to speak to her, □  
And is almost afraid that I □ will commit that indiscretion.

*Questions*

1. Describe the setting of this poem in your own words. Where is this taking place?
2. Simile is used to describe the girl. How does the image in the first line make you picture this young woman to appear?
3. List character traits ascribed to the girl. Who is she and how does she act?

#### 46. I wandered lonely as a cloud

*William Wordsworth*

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company;  
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

#### *Questions*

1. What would you identify as the theme of this poem?
2. What three literary or poetic devices would best support the theme you identified? Identify each device and provide supporting examples.

#### 47. Suicide Note

*Langston Hughes*

The calm,  
Cool face of the river  
Asked me for a kiss.

#### *Questions*

1. Explain the poem in your own words.
2. Would this message be as meaningful if written in prose instead of poetry? Explain your answer.

#### 48. A Drink of Water

*Seamus Haney*

She came every morning to draw water  
Like an old bat staggering up the field:  
The pump's whooping cough, the bucket's clatter  
And slow diminuendo as it filled,  
Announced her. I recall  
Her grey apron, the pocked white enamel  
Of the brimming bucket, and the treble  
Creak of her voice like the pump's handle.  
Nights when a full moon lifted past her gable  
It fell back through her window and would lie  
Into the water set out on the table.  
Where I have dipped to drink again, to be  
Faithful to the admonishment on her cup,  
*Remember the Giver* fading off the lip.

#### *Questions*

1. Read the poem aloud. In what lines do you notice interesting use of alliteration and assonance? Write down the phrases in question.
2. What type of sonnet is this poem most similar to? In what ways does this poem obviously stray from being a textbook example of a sonnet?
3. What do you think the poem means? Explain in your own words.

## HOW TO EXPLICATE A POEM

(Thanks to Betsy Draine of the University of Wisconsin-Madison)

A good poem is like a puzzle--the most fascinating part is studying the individual pieces carefully and then putting them back together to see how beautifully the whole thing fits together. A poem can have a number of different "pieces" that you need to look at closely in order to complete the poetic "puzzle." This sheet explains one way to attempt an explication of a poem, by examining each "piece" of the poem separately. (An "explication" is simply an explanation of how all the elements in a poem work together to achieve the total meaning and effect.)

Examine the **situation** in the poem:

Does the poem tell a story? Is it a narrative poem? If so, what events occur?

Does the poem express an emotion or describe a mood?

Poetic voice: Who is the speaker? Is the poet speaking to the reader directly or is the poem told through a fictional "persona"? To whom is he speaking? Can you trust the speaker?

**Tone:** What is the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem? What sort of tone of voice seems to be appropriate for reading the poem out loud? What words, images, or ideas give you a clue to the tone?

Examine the **structure** of the poem:

**Form:** Look at the number of lines, their length, their arrangement on the page. How does the form relate to the content? Is it a traditional form (e.g. sonnet, limerick) or "free form"? Why do you think the poet chose that form for his poem?

**Movement:** How does the poem develop? Are the images and ideas developed chronologically, by cause and effect, by free association? Does the poem circle back to where it started, or is the movement from one attitude to a different attitude (e.g. from despair to hope)?

**Syntax:** How many sentences are in the poem? Are the sentences simple or complicated? Are the verbs in front of the nouns instead of in the usual "noun, verb" order? Why?

**Punctuation:** What kind of punctuation is in the poem? Does the punctuation always coincide with the end of a poetic line? If so, this is called an **end-stopped line**. If there is no punctuation at the end of a line and the thought continues into the next line, this is called **enjambement**. Is there any punctuation in the middle of a line? Why do you think the poet would want you to pause halfway through the line?

**Title:** What does the title mean? How does it relate to the poem itself?

Examine the **language** of the poem:

**Diction** or Word Choice: Is the language colloquial, formal, simple, unusual?

Do you know what all the words mean? If not, look them up.

What moods or attitudes are associated with words that stand out for you?

**Allusions:** Are there any allusions (references) to something outside the poem, such as events or people from history, mythology, or religion?

**Imagery:** Look at the figurative language of the poem--metaphors, similes, analogies, personification. How do these images add to the meaning of the poem or intensify the effect of the poem?

Examine the **musical devices** in the poem:

**Rhyme scheme:** Does the rhyme occur in a regular pattern, or irregularly? Is the effect formal, satisfying, musical, funny, disconcerting?

**Rhythm** or **meter:** In most languages, there is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a word or words in a sentence. In poetry, the variation of stressed and unstressed syllables and words has a rhythmic effect. What is the tonal effect of the rhythm here?

Other "sound effects": **alliteration, assonance, consonance repetition**. What tonal effect do they have here?

Has the poem created a change in mood for you--or a change in attitude? How have the technical elements helped the poet create this effect?

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