

**Free response poetry questions—AP English Literature and Composition—1980 – 2004**

**1980** Write an essay in which you describe how the speaker's attitude toward loss in lines 16-19 is related to her attitude toward loss in lines 1-15. Using specific references to the text, show how verse form and language contribute to the reader's understanding of these attitudes.

ELIZABETH BISHOP: ONE ART

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something everyday. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these things will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

**1981** Write an essay in which you explain how the organization of the poem and the use of concrete details reveal both its literal and its metaphorical meanings. In your discussion, show how both of these meanings relate to the title.

ADRIENNE RICH: STORM WARNINGS

The glass barometer has been falling all the afternoon,  
And knowing better than the instrument  
What winds are walking overhead, what zone  
Of gray unrest is moving across the land,  
I leave the book upon a pillowed chair 5  
And walk from window to closed window, watching  
Boughs strain against the sky.

And think again, as often as when the air  
Moves inward toward a silent core of waiting,  
How with a single purpose time has traveled 10  
By secret currents of the undiscerned  
Into this polar realm. Weather abroad  
And weather in the heart alike come on  
Regardless of prediction.

Between foreseeing and averting change 15  
Lies all the mastery of elements  
Which clocks and weatherglasses cannot alter.  
Time in the hand is not control of time,  
Nor shattered fragments of an instrument  
A proof against the wind; the wind will rise, 20  
We can only close the shutters.

I draw the curtains as the sky goes black  
And set a match to candles sheathed in glass  
Against the keyhole draught, the insistent whine  
Of weather through the unsealed aperture. 25  
This is our sole defense against the season;  
These are the things that we have learned to do  
Who live in troubled regions.

**1982** "The Groundhog" (Richard Eberhart) Write an essay in which you analyze how the language of the poem reflects the changing perceptions and emotions of the speaker as he considers the metamorphosis of the dead groundhog. Develop your essay with specific references to the text of the poem.

THE GROUNDHOG: RICHARD EBERHART

In June, amid the golden fields,  
 I saw a groundhog lying dead.  
 Dead lay he; my senses shook,  
 and mind outshot our naked frailty.  
 There lowly in the vigorous summer 5  
 His form began its senseless change,  
 And made my senses waver dim  
 Seeing nature ferocious in him.  
 Inspecting close his maggots' might  
 And seething cauldron of his being, 10  
 Half with loathing, half with a strange love,  
 I poked him with an angry stick.  
 The fever arose, became a flame  
 And Vigour circumscribed the skies,  
 Immense energy in the sun, 15  
 And through my frame a sunless trembling.  
 My stick had done nor good nor harm.  
 Then stood I silent in the day  
 Watching the object, as before;  
 And kept my reverence for knowledge 20  
 Trying for control, to be still,  
 To quell the passion of the blood;  
 Until I had bent down on my knees  
 Praying for joy in the sight of decay.  
 And so I left; and I returned 25  
 In Autumn strict of eye, to see  
 The sap gone out of the groundhog,  
 But the bony sodden hulk remained.  
 But the year had lost its meaning,  
 And in intellectual chains 30  
 I lost both love and loathing,  
 Mured up in the wall of wisdom.  
 Another summer took the fields again  
 Massive and burning, full of life,  
 But when I chanced upon the spot 35  
 There was only a little hair left,  
 And bones bleaching in the sunlight

Beautiful as architecture;  
I watched them like a geometer,  
And cut a walking stick from a birch. 40  
It has been three years, now.  
There is no sign of the groundhog.  
I stood there in the whirling summer,  
My hand capped a withered heart,  
And thought of China and of Greece, 45  
Of Alexander in his tent;  
Of Montaigne in his tower,  
Of Saint Theresa in her wild lament.

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**1983** Write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the attitude of the clocks with that of the lover. Through careful analysis of the language and imagery, show how this contrast is important to the meaning of the poem.

W. H. AUDEN : AS I WALKED OUT ONE EVENING

As I walked out one evening,  
Walking down Bristol Street,  
The crowds upon the pavement  
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river                    5  
I heard a lover sing  
Under an arch of the railway:  
"Love has no ending.

"I'll love you, dear, I'll love you                    10  
Till China and Africa meet,  
And the river jumps over the mountain  
And the salmon sing in the street.

"I'll love you till the ocean  
Is folded and hung up to dry                    15  
And the seven stars go squawking  
Like geese about the sky.

"The years shall run like rabbits,  
For in my arms I hold  
The Flower of the Ages,  
And the first love of the world."                    20

But all the clocks in the city  
Began to whirr and chime:  
"O let not Time deceive you  
You cannot conquer Time.

"In the burrows of the Nightmare                    25  
Where Justice naked is,  
Time watches from the shadow  
And coughs when you would kiss.

"In headaches and in worry  
Vaguely life leaks away,                    30

And time will have his fancy  
 To-morrow or to-day.

"Into many a green valley  
 Drifts the appalling snow  
 Time breaks the threaded dances                    35  
 And the diver's brilliant bow.

"O plunge your hands in water  
 Plunge them up to the wrist;  
 Stare, stare in the basin  
 And wonder what you've missed."                    40

"The glacier knocks in the cupboard,  
 The desert sighs in the bed,  
 And the crack in the tea-cup opens  
 A lane to the land of the dead.

"Where the beggars raffle the banknotes                    45  
 And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,  
 And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer  
 And Jill goes down on her back."

"O look, look in the mirror,  
 O look in your distress;                                    50  
 Life remains a blessing  
 Although you cannot bless."

"O stand, stand at the window  
 As the tears scald and start;  
 You shall love your crooked neighbour                    55  
 With your crooked heart."

It was late, late in the evening  
 The lovers they were gone;  
 The clocks had ceased their chiming,  
 And the deep river ran on.                                    60

**1984**

Select a line or two of poetry, or a moment or scene in a novel, epic poem, or play that you find especially memorable. Write an essay in which you identify the line or the passage, explain its relationship to the work in which it is found, and analyze the reasons for its effectiveness.

Do not base your essay on a work that you know about only from having seen a television or movie production of it. Select a work of recognized literary merit.

**1985** These two poems present encounters with nature, but the two poets handle those encounters very differently. In a well-organized essay, distinguish between the attitudes (toward nature, toward the solitary individual, etc.) expressed in the poems and discuss the techniques that the poets use to present these attitudes. Be sure to support your statements with specific references.

### There Was a Boy

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs  
And islands of Winander! many a time,  
At evening, when the earliest stars began  
To move along the edges of the hills,  
Rising or setting, would he stand alone,  
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;  
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands  
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth  
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,  
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls  
That they might answer him.--And they would shout  
Across the watery vale, and shout again,  
Responsive to his call,--with quivering peals,  
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud  
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild  
Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause  
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:  
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung  
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise  
Has carried far into his heart the voice  
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene  
Would enter unawares into his mind  
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,  
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received  
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

William Wordsworth

### The Most of It

He thought he kept the universe alone;  
for all the voice in answer he could wake  
Was but the mocking echo of his own  
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.  
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach  
He would cry out on life, that what it wants  
Is not its own love back in copy speech,



But counter-love, original response.  
And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
in the cliff's talus<sup>1</sup> on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,  
Pushing the great water up ahead,  
And landed pouring like a waterfall,  
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,  
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.

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<sup>1</sup> Rock debris at the bottom of a cliff

**1986** "Ogun" (E. K. Braithwaite) Read the poem. You will note that it has two major sections that are joined by another section, lines 21-26. Write an essay in which you discuss how the diction, imagery, and movement of the verse in the poem reflect differences in tone and content between the two larger sections.

### Ogun<sup>1</sup>

My uncle made chairs, tables, balanced doors on, dug out  
coffins, smoothing the white wood out

with plane and quick sandpaper until  
it shone like his short-sighted glasses.

The knuckles of his hands were sil-  
vered knobs of nails hit, hurt and flat-

tened out with blast of heavy hammer. He was knock-knee'd, flat-  
footed and his clip clop sandals slapped across the concrete

flooring of his little shop where canefield mulemen and a fleet  
of Bedford lorry<sup>2</sup> drivers dropped in to scratch themselves and talk.

There was no shock of wood, no beam  
of light mahogany his saw teeth couldn't handle.

When shaping squares for locks, a key hole  
care tapped rat tat tat upon the handle

of his humpbacked chisel. Cold  
world of wood caught fire as he whittled: rectangle

window frames, the intersecting x of fold-  
ing chairs, triangle

trellises, the donkey  
box-cart in its squeaking square.

But he was poor and most days he was hungry.  
Imported cabinets with mirrors, formica table

tops, spine-curving chairs made up of tubes, with hollow  
steel-like bird bones that sat on rubber ploughs,

thin beds, stretched not on boards, but blue high-tensioned cables,  
were what the world preferred.

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<sup>1</sup> Ogun is the Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean creator-god.

<sup>2</sup> Lorry: truck

And yet he had a block of wood that would have baffled them.  
With knife and gimlet care he worked away at this on Sundays,

explored its knotted hurts, cutting his way  
along its yellow whorls until his hands could feel

how it had swelled and shivered, breathing air,  
its weathered green burning to rings of time,

its contoured grain still tuned to roots and water.  
And as he cut, he heard the creak of forests:

green lizard faces gulped, grey memories with moth  
eyes watched him from their shadows, soft

liquid tendrils leaked among the flowers  
and a black rigid thunder he had never heard within his hammer

came stomping up the trunks. And as he worked within his  
shattered Sunday shop, the wood took shape: dry shuttered

eyes, slack anciently everted lips, flat  
ruined face, eaten by pox, ravaged by rat

and woodwork, dry cistern mouth, cracked  
gullet crying for the desert, the heavy black

enduring jaw; lost pain, lost iron;  
emerging woodwork image of his anger.

E. K. Braithwaite  
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**1987** Read the poem below carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the presentation of the sow. Consider particularly how the language of the poem reflects both the neighbor's and the narrator's perceptions of the sow and how the language determines the reader's perceptions. Be certain to discuss how the portrayal of the sow is enhanced by such features as diction, devices of sound, images, and allusions.

### Sow

God knows how our neighbor managed to breed  
His great sow:  
Whatever his shrewd secret, he kept it hid

In the same way  
He kept the sow—impounded from public stare,  
Prize ribbon and pig show.

But one dusk our questions commended us to a tour  
Through his lantern-lit  
Maze of barns to the lintel of the sunk sty door

To gape at it:  
This was no rose-and-larkspurred china suckling  
With a penny slot

For thrifty children, nor dolt pig ripe for heckling,  
About to be  
Glorified for prime flesh and golden crackling

In a parsley halo;  
Nor even one of the common barnyard sows,  
Mire-smirched, blowzy,

Maunching thistle and knotweed on her snout- cruise—  
Bloat tun of milk  
On the move, hedged by a litter of feat-foot ninnies

Shrilling her hulk  
To halt for a swig at the pink teats. No. This vast  
Brobdingnag bulk

Of a sow lounged belly-bedded on that black compost,  
Fat-ruttred eyes  
Dream-filmed. What a vision of ancient hoghood must

Thus wholly engross  
The great grandam!--our marvel blazoned a knight,  
Helmed, in cuirass,

Unhorsed and shredded in the grove of combat  
By a grisly-bristled  
Boar, fabulous enough to straddle that sow's heat.

But our farmer whistled,  
Then, with a jocular fist thwacked the barrel nape,  
And the green-copse-castled

Pig hove, letting legend like dried mud drop,  
Slowly, grunt  
On grunt, up in the flickering light to shape

A monument  
Prodigious in gluttonies as that hog whose want  
Made lean Lent

Of kitchen slops and, stomaching no constraint,  
Proceeded to swill  
The seven troughed seas and every earthquaking continent.

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**1988** Read the following two poems very carefully, noting that the second includes an allusion to the first. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss their similarities and differences. In your essay, be sure to consider both theme and style.

I  
Bright Star

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,<sup>1</sup>  
The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

—John Keats

II  
Choose Something Like a Star

O Star (the fairest one in sight),  
We grant your loftiness the right  
To some obscurity of cloud—  
It will not do to say of night,  
Since dark is what brings out your light.  
Some mystery becomes the proud.  
But to the wholly taciturn  
In your reserve is not allowed.  
Say something to us we can learn  
By heart and when alone repeat.  
Say something! And it says, 'I burn.'  
But say with what degree of heat.  
Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.  
Use Language we can comprehend.  
Tell us what elements you blend.  
It gives us strangely little aid,  
But does tell something in the end  
And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,  
Not even stooping from its sphere,  
It asks a little of us here.  
It asks of us a certain height,  
So when at times the mob is swayed  
To carry praise or blame too far,  
We may choose something like a star  
To stay our minds on and be staid.

—Robert Frost

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<sup>1</sup> hermit

**1989** "The Great Scarf of Birds" (John Updike) Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the poem's organization, diction, and figurative language prepare the reader for the speaker's concluding response.

JOHN UPDIKE: THE GREAT SCARF OF BIRDS

Playing golf on Cape Ann in October,  
I saw something to remember.

Ripe apples were caught like red fish in he nets  
of their branches. The maples  
were colored like apples, 5  
part orange and red, part green.  
the elms, already transparent trees,  
seemed swaying vases full of sky. The sky  
was dramatic with great stragglng V's  
of geese streaming south, mare's-tails above them. 10  
their trumpeting made us look up and around.  
the course sloped into salt marshes,  
and this seemed to cause the abundance of birds.

As if out of the Bible  
or science fiction, 15  
a cloud appeared, a cloud of dots  
like iron filings which a magnet  
underneath the paper undulates.  
It dartingly darkened in spots,  
paled, pulsed, compressed, distended, yet 20  
held an identity firm: a flock  
of starlings, as much one thing as a rock.  
One will moved above the trees  
the liquid and hesitant drift.

Come nearer, it became less marvelous, 25  
more legible, and merely huge.  
"I never saw so many birds!" my friend exclaimed.  
We returned out eyes to the game.  
Later, as Lot's wife must have done,  
in a pause of walking, not thinking 30  
of calling down a consequence,  
I lazily looked around.  
The rise of the fairway above us was tinted,  
so evenly tinted I might not have noticed  
but that at the rim of the delicate shadow 35  
the starlings were thicker and outlined the flock

as an inkstain in drying pronounces its edges.  
The gradual rise of green was vastly covered;  
I had though nothing in nature could be so broad but grass.

And as 40

I watched, one bird,  
prompted by accident or will to lead,  
ceased resting' and, lifting in a casual billow,  
The flock ascended as a lady's scarf,  
transparent, of gray, might be twitched 45  
by one corner, drawn upward and then,  
decided against, negligently tossed toward a chair:  
the southward cloud withdrew into the air.

Long had it been since my heart  
had been lifted as it was by the lifting of that great scarf 50.

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**1990** Soliloquy ("Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown") from *Henry IV, Part II* (Shakespeare) In the soliloquy, King Henry laments his inability to sleep. In a well-organized essay, briefly summarize the King's thoughts and analyze how the diction, imagery, and syntax help to convey his state of mind.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: HENRY IV, PART II  
Act III, scene i

How many thousands of my poorest subjects  
Are at this hour asleep! O sleep, O gentle sleep,  
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,  
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down  
And steep my senses in forgetfulness? 5  
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs<sup>1</sup>,  
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee  
And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber  
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,  
Under the canopies of costly state, 10  
And lull'd with sound of sweetest melody?  
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile  
In loathsome beds, and leavest the kingly couch  
A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell?  
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast 15  
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge  
And in the visitation of the winds,  
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them 20  
With deafening clamour in the slippery clouds,  
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?  
Canst thou, O partial<sup>2</sup> sleep, give thy repose  
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude;  
And in the calmest and most stillest night, 25  
With all appliances and means to boot,  
Deny it to a king? Then happy low, lie down!  
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

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<sup>1</sup> huts

<sup>2</sup> not impartial

**1991** "The Last Night that She Lived" (Emily Dickinson) Write an essay in which you describe the speaker's attitude toward the woman's death. Using specific references from the text, show how the use of language reveals the speaker's attitudes.

EMILY DICKINSON: THE LAST NIGHT THAT SHE LIVED
--

The last Night that She lived  
It was a Common Night  
Except the Dying—this to Us  
Made Nature different

We noticed smallest things—                     5  
Things overlooked before  
By this great light upon our Minds  
Italicized—as 'twere.

As We went out and in                                 10  
Between Her final Room  
And Rooms where Those to be alive  
Tomorrow were, a Blame

That Others could exist  
While She must finish quite                         15  
A Jealousy for Her arose  
So nearly infinite—

We waited while She passed—  
It was a narrow time—  
Too jostled were Our Souls to speak  
At length the notice came.                         20

She mentioned, and forgot—  
Then lightly as a Reed  
Bent to the Water, struggled scarce—  
Consented, and was dead—

And We—We placed the Hair—                     25  
And drew the Head erect—  
And then an awful leisure was  
Belief to regulate—

**1992** In the passage below, which comes from William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, the speaker encounters unfamiliar aspects of the natural world. Write an essay in which you trace the speaker's changing responses to his experience and explain how they are conveyed by the poem's diction, imagery, and tone.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: THE PRELUDE

One summer evening (led by her <sup>1</sup> ) I found A little boat tied to a willow tree Within a rocky cave, its usual home. Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth	5
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on; Leaving behind her still, on either side, Small circles glittering idly in the moon, Until they melted all into one track	10
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows, Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point With an unswerving line, I fixed my view Upon the summit of a craggy ridge, The horizon's utmost boundary; far above	15
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky. She was an elfin pinnace <sup>2</sup> ; lustily I dipped my oars into the silent lake, And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat Went heaving through the water like a swan;	20
When, from behind that craggy steep till then The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge, As if with voluntary power instinct, Upreared its head. I struck and struck again, And growing still in stature the grim shape	25
Towered up between me and the stars, and still, For so it seemed, with purpose of its own And measured motion like a living thing, Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned, And through the silent water stole my way	30
Back to the covert of the willow tree; There in her mooring-place I left my bark,-- And through the meadows homeward went, in grave And serious mood; but after I had seen That spectacle, for many days, my brain	35

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<sup>1</sup> Nature

<sup>2</sup> small boat

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts  
There hung a darkness, call it solitude  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

**1993** Read the following poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you discuss how such elements as language, imagery, structure, and point of view convey meaning in the poem.

MAY SWENSON: THE CENTAUR<sup>1</sup>

The summer that I was ten—  
Can it be there was only one  
summer that I was ten?

It must have been a long one then—  
each day I'd go out to choose                   5  
a fresh horse from my stable

which was a willow grove  
down by the old canal.  
I'd go on my two bare feet.

But when, with my brother's jack-knife,                   10  
I had cut me a long limber horse  
with a good thick knob for a head,

and peeled him slick and clean  
except a few leaves for the tail,  
and cinched my brother's belt                   15

around his head for a rein,  
I'd straddle and canter him fast  
up the grass bank to the path,

trot along in the lovely dust  
that talcumed over his hoofs,                   20  
hiding my toes, and turning

his feet to swift half-moons.  
The willow knob with the strap  
jouncing between my thighs

was the pommel and yet the poll                   25  
of my nickering pony's head.  
My head and my neck were mine,

yet they were shaped like a horse.  
My hair flopped to the side

---

<sup>1</sup> A creature in Greek mythology that had the body of a horse and the head and torso of a man.

like the mane of a horse in the wind. 30

My forelock swung in my eyes,  
my neck arched and I snorted.  
I shied and skittered and reared,

stopped and raised my knees,  
pawed at the ground and quivered. 35  
My teeth bared as we wheeled

and swished through the dust again.  
I was the horse and the rider,  
and the leather I slapped to his rump

spanked my own behind. 40  
Doubled, my two hoofs beat  
a gallop along the bank,

the wind twanged in my mane,  
my mouth squared to the bit.  
And yet I sat on my steed 45

quiet, negligent riding,  
my toes standing the stirrups,  
my thighs hugging his ribs.

At a walk we drew up to the porch.  
I tethered him to a paling. 50  
Dismounting, I smoothed my skirt

and entered the dusky hall.  
My feet on the clean linoleum  
left ghostly toes in the hall.

*Where have you been?* said my mother. 55  
*Been riding,* I said from the sink,  
and filled me a glass of water.

*What's that in your pocket?* she said.  
*Just my knife.* It weighted my pocket  
and stretched my dress awry. 60

*Go tie back your hair,* said my mother,  
and *Why Is your mouth all green?*  
*Rob Roy, he pulled some clover*  
*as we crossed the field,* I told her.

**1994** The following two poems are about Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, a Greek king. She was carried off to Troy by the Trojan prince Paris, and her abduction was the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

Read the two poems carefully. Considering such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers' views of Helen.

EDGAR ALLAN POE: TO HELEN

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore. 5

On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece  
And the grandeur that was Rome. 10

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy Land! 15

H.D.: HELEN

All Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre as of olives  
where she stands,  
and the white hands. 5

All Greece reviles  
the wan face when she smiles,  
hating it deeper still  
when it grows wan and white,  
remembering past enchantments 10

and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,  
God's daughter, born of love,  
the beauty of cool feet  
and slenderest knees,                    15  
could love indeed the maid,  
only if she were laid,  
white ash amid funereal cypresses.



**1995** Read the following poem carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the speaker uses the varied imagery of the poem to reveal his attitude toward the nature of love.

JOHN DONNE: THE BROKEN HEART

He is stark mad, whoever says,  
That he hath been in love an hour,  
Yet not that love so soon decays,  
But that it can ten in less space devour ;  
Who will believe me, if I swear 5  
That I have had the plague a year?  
Who would not laugh at me, if I should say  
I saw a flash of powder burn a day?

Ah, what a trifle is a heart,  
If once into love's hands it come ! 10  
All other griefs allow a part  
To other griefs, and ask themselves but some ;  
They come to us, but us love draws ;  
He swallows us and never chaws ;<sup>1</sup>  
By him, as by chain'd shot,<sup>2</sup> whole ranks do die ; 15  
He is the tyrant pike, our hearts the fry.<sup>3</sup>

If 'twere not so, what did become  
Of my heart when I first saw thee?  
I brought a heart into the room,  
But from the room I carried none with me. 20  
If it had gone to thee, I know  
Mine would have taught thine heart to show  
More pity unto me ; but Love, alas !  
At one first blow did shiver it as glass.

Yet nothing can to nothing fall, 25  
Nor any place be empty quite ;  
Therefore I think my breast hath all  
Those pieces still, though they be not unite ;  
And now, as broken glasses<sup>4</sup> show  
A hundred lesser faces, so 30  
My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,  
But after one such love, can love no more.

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<sup>1</sup> chews

<sup>2</sup> cannon balls chained together

<sup>3</sup> small fish that the pike devours

<sup>4</sup> mirrors

**1996** Read carefully the following poem by the colonial American poet, Anne Bradstreet. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how the poem's controlling metaphor expresses the complex attitude of the speaker.

ANNE BRADSTREET: THE AUTHOR TO HER BOOK

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,  
Till snatcht from thence by friends, less wise than true,  
Who thee abroad expos'd to public view,  
5 Made thee in rags, halting to th' press to trudge,  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).  
At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call.  
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
10 Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight,  
Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could.  
I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw,  
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
15 I stretcht thy joints to make thee even feet,  
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet.  
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun Cloth, i' th' house I find.  
In this array, 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam.  
20 In Critics' hands, beware thou dost not come,  
And take thy way where yet thou art not known.  
If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none;  
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,  
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

**1997** Read the following poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how formal elements such as structure, syntax, diction, and imagery reveal the speaker's response to the death of a toad.

RICHARD WILBUR: THE DEATH OF A TOAD

A toad the power mower caught,  
Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got  
To the garden verge, and sanctuaried him  
Under the cineraria leaves, in the shade  
Of the ashen and heartshaped leaves, in a dim, 5  
Low, and a final glade.

The rare original heartsbleed goes,  
Spends in the earthen hide, in the folds and wizenings, flows  
In the gutters of the banked and staring eyes. He lies  
As still as if he would return to stone, 10  
And soundlessly attending, dies  
Toward some deep monotone,

Toward misted and ebullient seas  
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.  
Day dwindles, drowning and at length is gone 15  
In the wide and antique eyes, which still appear  
To watch, across the castrate lawn,  
The haggard daylight steer.

**1998** The following poem was written by a contemporary Irish woman, Eavan Boland. Read the poem carefully and then write an essay in which you analyze how the poem reveals the speaker's complex conception of a "woman's world."

EAVEN BOLAND: IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

Our way of life  
has hardly changed  
since a wheel first  
whetted a knife.

Well, maybe flame                    5  
burns more greedily  
and wheels are steadier  
but we're the same

who milestone  
Our lives                                10  
with oversights—  
living by the lights

of the loaf left  
by the cash register,  
the washing powder                15  
paid for and wrapped,

the wash left wet.  
Like most historic peoples  
we are defined  
by what we forget,                20

by what we never will be:  
star-gazers,  
fire-eaters.  
It's our alibi

for all time                            25  
that as far as history goes  
we were never  
on the scene of the crime.

So when the king's head  
gored its basket—                    30

grim harvest—  
we were gristing bread

or getting the recipe  
for a good soup  
to appetize 35  
our gossip.

And it's still the same:  
By night our windows  
moth our children  
(40) to the flame 40

of hearth not history.  
And still no page  
scores the low music  
of our outrage.

But appearances 45  
still reassure:  
That woman there,  
craned to the starry mystery

is merely getting a breath  
of evening air, 50  
while this one here—  
her mouth

a burning plume—  
she's no fire-eater,  
just my frosty neighbour 55  
coming home.

**1999** Read the following poem carefully, paying particular attention to the physical intensity of the language. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how the poet conveys not just a literal description of picking blackberries but a deeper understanding of the whole experience. You may wish to include analysis of such elements as diction, imagery, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, and form.

SEAMUS HEANEY: BLACKBERRY-PICKING

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                   5  
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.           10  
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                   15  
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                   20  
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.

**2000** The story of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens and the enchanting but deadly song appears in Greek epic poetry in Homer's *Odyssey*. An English translation of the episode is reprinted in the left column below. Margaret Atwood's poem in the right column is a modern commentary on the classical story. Read both texts carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare the portrayals of the Sirens. Your analysis should include discussion of tone, point of view, and whatever poetic devices (diction, imagery, etc.) seem most important.

... our trim ship was speeding toward  
the Sirens' island, driven by the brisk wind.

...

Now with a sharp sword I sliced an ample wheel of beeswax  
down into pieces, kneaded them in my two strong hands  
and the wax soon grew soft, worked by my strength 5  
and Helios' burning rays, the sun at high noon,  
and I stopped the ears of my comrades one by one.  
They bound me hand and foot in the tight ship—  
erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast—  
and rowed and churned the whitecaps stroke on stroke. 10  
We were just offshore as far as a man's shout can carry,  
scudding close, when the Sirens sensed at once a ship  
was racing past and burst into their high, thrilling song:  
'Come closer, famous Odysseus—Achaea's pride and glory—  
moor your ship on our coast so you can hear our song! 15  
Never has any sailor passed our shores in his black craft  
until he has heard the honeyed voices pouring from our lips,  
and once he hears to his heart's content sails on, a wiser man.'

...

So they sent their ravishing voices out across the air  
and the heart inside me throbbed to listen longer. 20  
I signaled the crew with frowns to set me free—  
they flung themselves at the oars and rowed on harder,  
Perimedes and Eurylochus springing up at once  
to bind me faster with rope on chafing rope.  
but once we'd left the Sirens fading in our wake, 25  
once we could hear their song no more, their urgent call—  
my steadfast crew was quick to remove the wax I'd used  
to seal their ears and loosed the bonds that lashed me.

This is the one song everyone  
would like to learn: the song  
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men  
to leap overboard in squadrons         5  
even though they see the beached skull

the song nobody knows  
because anyone who has heard it  
is dead, and the others can't remember

Shall I tell you the secret                 10  
and if I do, will you get me  
out of this bird suit?<sup>1</sup>

I don't enjoy it here  
squatting on this island  
looking picturesque and mythical         15

with these two feathery manias,  
I don't enjoy singing  
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,  
to you, only to you.                         20  
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!  
Only you, only you can,  
you are unique

at last. Alas                                     25  
it is a boring song  
but it works every time.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology, Sirens are often represented as birds with the heads of women.



**2001** In each of the following poems, the speaker responds to the conditions of a particular place and time—England in 1802 in the first poem, the United States about 100 years later in the second. Read each poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems and analyze the relationship between them.

London, 1802

Milton!<sup>1</sup> thou shouldst be living at this hour;  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen<sup>2</sup>  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower<sup>3</sup> 5  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea: 10  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

Douglass<sup>4</sup>

Ah, Douglass, we have fall'n on evil days,  
Such days as thou, not even thou didst know,  
When thee, the eyes of that harsh long ago  
Saw, salient, at the cross of devious ways,  
And all the country heard thee with amaze. 5  
Not ended then, the passionate ebb and flow,  
The awful tide that battled to and fro;  
We ride amid a tempest of dispraise.  
  
Now, when the waves of swift dissension swarm,  
And Honour, the strong pilot, lieth stark, 10  
Oh, for thy voice high-sounding o'er the storm,  
For thy strong arm to guide the shivering bark,  
The blast-defying power of thy form,

---

<sup>1</sup> John Milton, (1608 – 1674) English poet and political writer, author of *Paradise Lost*, whose famous essay against censorship, “Areopagetica,” championed the cause of liberty and public virtue.

<sup>2</sup> swamp

<sup>3</sup> natural endowment

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Douglass, (1817 - 1895), American writer, former slave, whose *Autobiography* (1845) made him a leader in the abolitionist cause.

To give us comfort through the lonely dark.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872 – 1906)

**2002** Read the following poem carefully. Then, taking into account the title of the poem, analyze how the poetic devices convey the speaker's attitude toward the sinking of the ship.

The Convergence of the Twain  
(*Lines on the loss of the Titanic*<sup>1</sup>)

I

In a solitude of the sea  
Deep from human vanity,  
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres  
Of her salamandrine<sup>2</sup> fires,  
Cold currents thrid<sup>3</sup>, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant  
To glass the opulent  
The sea-worm crawls -- grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed  
To ravish the sensuous mind  
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near  
Gaze at the gilded gear  
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" . . .

VI

Well: while was fashioning  
This creature of cleaving wing,  
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

---

<sup>1</sup> On the night of April 14, 1912, the British White Star liner Titanic, the largest ship afloat, collided with an iceberg and sank on her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York. Fifteen hundred of the 2206 passengers lost their lives.

<sup>2</sup> Bright red. The salamander was supposed to be able to live in the midst of fire.

<sup>3</sup> Thread

Prepared a sinister mate  
For her -- so gaily great --  
A Shape of Ice, for the time fat and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew  
In stature, grace, and hue  
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:  
No mortal eye could see  
The intimate welding of their later history.

X

Or sign that they were bent  
By paths coincident  
On being anon twin halves of one August event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years  
Said "Now!" And each one hears,  
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

**2003** The following poems are both concerned with Eros, the god of love in Greek mythology. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare the two concepts of Eros and analyze the techniques used to create them.

ΕΡΩΣ <sup>1</sup>	Eros
<p>Why hast thou nothing in thy face?            Thou idol of the human race,            Thou tyrant of the human heart,            The flower of the lovely youth that art;            Yea, and that standest in thy youth            An image of eternal Truth,            With thy exuberant flesh so fair,            That only Pheidias<sup>2</sup> might compare,            Ere from his chaste marmoreal<sup>3</sup> form            Time had decayed the colours warm;            Like to his gods in thy proud dress,            Thy starry sheen of nakedness.</p> <p>Surely thy body is thy mind,            For in thy face is nought to find,            Only thy soft unchristen'd smile,            That shadows neither love nor guile,            But shameless will and power immense,            In secret sensuous innocence.</p> <p>O king of joy, what is thy thought?            I dream thou knowest it is nought            And wouldst in darkness come, but though            Makest the light where'er thou go.            Ah yet no victim of thy grace,            None who e'er long'd for thy embrace,            Hath cared to look upon thy face.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—Robert Bridges (1899)</p>	<p>I call for love            But help me, who arrives?            This thug with broken nose            And squinty eyes.            “Eros, my bully boy,            Can this be you,            With boxer lips            And patchy wings askew?”</p> <p>‘Madam,’ cries Eros,            ‘Know the brute you see            Is what long overuse            Has made of me.            My face that so offends you            Is the sum            Of blows your lust delivered            One by one.</p> <p>We slaves who are immortal            Gloss your fate            And are the archetypes            That you create.            Better my battered visage,            Bruised but hot,            Than love dissolved in loss            Or left to rot.’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—Anne Stevenson (1990)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Anne Stevenson, <i>Collected Poems</i>            1955-1995, Bloodaxe Books, 2000.</small></p>

<sup>1</sup> Eros (in Greek)

<sup>2</sup> Greek sculptor of the fifth century BCE

<sup>3</sup> marble

**2004** The poems below are concerned with darkness and night. Read each poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, compare and contrast the poems, analyzing the significance of dark or night in each. In your essay, consider such elements as point of view, imagery, and structure.

We grow accustomed to the Dark—  
When light is put away—  
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp  
To witness her Goodbye—

A Moment—We uncertain step  
For newness of the night—  
Then—fit our Vision to the Dark—  
And meet the Road—erect—

And so of larger—Darkness—  
Those Evenings of the Brain—  
When not a Moon disclose a sign—  
Or Star—come out—within—

The Bravest—grope a little—  
And sometimes hit a Tree  
Directly in the Forehead—  
But as they learn to see—

Either the Darkness alters—  
Or something in the sight  
Adjusts itself to Midnight—  
And Life steps almost straight.

—Emily Dickinson

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain -- and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
O luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

—Robert Frost