Feedback for “On the Subway” Timed Writing

- Always include the author and title of the piece you are analyzing in your introduction. Don’t just refer to “the author” or “the poem.” You will always be given this information.
- Make sure you directly address the task you are being asked to accomplish in the prompt in your introduction, but don’t do so in a “formulaic” way.
  - Formulaic: Sharon Olds’ poem “On the Subway” brings two contrasting worlds into close proximity. Through the use of various literary techniques, she develops contrasts and discusses the insights the narrator comes to as a result of her experience on the subway.
  - Interesting: In her poem “On the Subway,” Sharon Olds brings a wealthy, upper class white woman and an impoverished, lower class black boy together in the most common of settings, the subway. Through the use of similes, metaphors and imagery, Olds develops not only the obvious physical and socioeconomic differences between the two but also the less obvious similarities between the narrator and her object. As a result of her experience, the narrator comes to the uncomfortable conclusion that she is not so different or separate from the “boy” across from her on the subway after all.
- Don’t confuse speaker and author. Never assume the speaker IS the author – unless this is indicated in the prompt, we can’t know this for sure. If the speaker does not have a name, simply refer to him as “the speaker.” Since “speaker” is a singular noun, you will need to use a singular pronoun to refer back to it (him/her). If you’re not sure what gender the speaker is, pick one and stick with it. Don’t use “them” – this creates a pronoun/antecedent agreement issue since “speaker” is singular.
- Avoid saying, “I think/I believe/I feel.” You are the writer. I know that you think/believe/feel what you are writing. Stating it repeatedly makes your argument sound weaker.
- Use a mix of direct quotations and paraphrased evidence to support your argument.
- Remember that the focus of the poetry essay is analysis, not evaluation. Your analysis should not include sentences like, “Olds does a good job showing . . .” This is evaluation, not analysis.
- Avoid sentences that have little informational value. Example: This is a very interesting and meaningful line in the poem.