The Poetry Essay
Why write a poetry essay?

- To determine how well you can read and interpret a sustained piece of literature.
- To demonstrate that you understand a text and can analyze the techniques and devices the poet uses to achieve his/her purpose.
- To demonstrate your ease and fluency with terminology, interpretation and analysis.
- To demonstrate the level of your writing and critical thinking.
How does the poet reveal character?
Discuss how poetic elements such as language, structure, imagery and point of view convey meaning in a poem.
Relate the imagery, form or theme of a particular section of a poem to another part of that same poem. Discuss the changing attitude or perception of speaker or reader.
Analyze a poem’s extended metaphor and how it reveals the speaker’s attitude.
Discuss the way of life revealed in a poem. Refer to such poetic elements as tone, imagery, symbol, and verse form.
Discuss the poet’s changing reaction to the subject developed in a poem.
Discuss how the form of a poem affects its meaning.
“Two Poem” Essays

- Discuss the similarities and differences between two poems. Consider style and theme.
- Contrast the speakers’ views toward a subject in two poems. Refer to form, tone, and imagery.
- Given two poems, discuss what elements make one better than the other.
Planning Your Time

- 1-3 minutes reading and “working the prompt”
- 5 minutes reading and making marginal notes about the poem
- 10 minutes preparing to write
- 20 minutes to write your essay
- 3 minutes for proofreading

TOTAL: 40 minutes
Working the Prompt

- Highlight, circle or underline the essential terms and elements in the prompt.
- Why?
  - You’ll read in a more directed manner when you know what’s expected.
  - You’ll be on the lookout for details to use in your essay once you’ve internalized the question.
  - You’ll stay on topic.
Reading and Notating

- FIRST, read quickly to get the gist of the poem. Isolate a few references that strike you.
- SECOND, reread the poem more carefully, highlighting and making marginal notes.

MARKING UP THE POEM IS NOT OPTIONAL!
The Opening Paragraph

- Make certain the topic is clear. Refer back to the question.
- Identify the title and the poet.
- Specifically mention the techniques you will refer to in your essay.
The Body of the Essay

- Use specific references and details from the poem. Don’t always paraphrase.
- Place quotation marks around words and phrases that you take from the poem.
- Repeat key ideas from your opening paragraph.
- Refer to multiple techniques. One good point is never enough. Three is a nice number.
- You must always interpret and analyze. Listing examples it not enough. For example, when you find a metaphor, you should not only identify it but also connect it to the poet’s intended purpose or meeting.