1970 Poem: “Elegy for Jane” (Theodore Roethke)

Prompt: Write an essay in which you describe the speaker’s attitude toward his former student, Jane.

1971 Poem: “The Unknown Citizen” (W.H. Auden)

Prompt: In a brief essay, identify at least two of the implications implicit in the society reflected in the poem. Support your statements by specific references to the poem.

1972 NO POEM 1973 (exam not available)

1974 Poem: “I wonder whether one expects...” (No poet given)

Prompt: Write a unified essay in which you relate the imagery of the last stanza to the speaker’s view of himself earlier in the poem and to his view of how others see poets.

1975 NO POEM

1976 Poem: “Poetry of Departures” (Philip Larkin)

Prompt: Write an essay in which you discuss how the poem’s diction (choice of words) reveals his attitude toward the two ways of living mentioned in the poem.

1977 Poem: “Piano” [2 poems with the same name] (D. H. Lawrence)

Prompt: Read both poems carefully and then write an essay in which you explain what characteristics of the second poem make it better than the first. Refer specifically to details of both poems.

1978 Poem: “Law Like Love” (W. H. Auden)

Prompt: Read the poem and the write an essay discussing the differences between the conceptions of 'law' in lines 1-34 and those in lines 35-60.

1979 Poems: “Spring And All” (William Carlos Williams) and “For Jane Meyers” (Louise Gluck)

Prompt: Read the two poems carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you show how the attitudes towards the coming of spring implied in these two poems differ from each other. Support your statements with specific references to the texts.

1980 Poem: “One Art” (Elizabeth Bishop)

Prompt: 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.

1981 Poem: “Storm Warnings” (Adrienne Rich)

Prompt: 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.


Prompt: 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.
1984 No Poem

1985 Poems: “There Was A Boy” (William Wordsworth) and “The Most of It” (Robert Frost)
Prompt: 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.

1986 Poem: “Ogun” (E. K. Braithwaite)
Prompt: 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 verse in the poem reflect differences in tone and content between the two larger sections.

1987 Poem: “Sow” (Sylvia Plath)
Prompt: Read the poem. 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.

1988 Poems: “Bright Star” (John Keats) and “Choose Something Like a Star” (Robert Frost)
Prompt: 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.

1989 Poem: “The Great Scarf of Birds” (John Updike)
Prompt: 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.

1990 Poem: Soliloquy from Henry IV, Part II (William Shakespeare)
Prompt: 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.

1991 Poem: “The Last Night that She lived...” (Emily Dickinson)
Prompt: 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 attitude.

Prompt: 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 experiences and explain how they are conveyed by the poem's diction, imagery, and tone.

1993 Poem: “The Centaur” (May Swenson)
Prompt: 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.
“Helen” (H.D.)
Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen 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 a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers’ views of Helen.

1995 Poem: “The Broken Heart” (John Donne)
Prompt: 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.

1996 Poem: “The Author to Her Book” (Anne Bradstreet)
Prompt: 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.

1997 Poem: “The Death of a Toad” (Richard Wilbur)
Prompt: 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.

1998 Poem: “It's a Woman's World” (Eavan Boland)
Prompt: 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.”

1999 Poem: “Blackberry-Picking” (Seamus Heaney)
Prompt: 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.

Prompt: 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.

2002 Poem: “The Convergence of the Twain” (Thomas Hardy)
Prompt: Read the following poem carefully. Then, taking into consideration the title of the poem, analyze how the poetic devices convey the speaker’s attitude toward the sinking of the ship.

Prompt: The following poem is a villanelle, a form having strict rules of rhyme, meter, and repetition. Read the poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the formal elements of the poem contribute to its meaning.

2003 Poems: “ΕΡΩΣ” (Robert Bridges) and “Eros” (Anne Stevenson)
Prompt: 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 and contrast the two concepts of Eros and analyze the techniques used to create them.
2003 Poem From Modern Love (George Meredith)

Prompt: The following poem is taken from Modern Love, a poetic sequence by the English writer George Meredith. Read the poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the poet conveys a view of "modern love."
9-8  These well-organized and well-written essays clearly demonstrate an understanding of how the speaker / author in _________ uses __________ to convey ___________. In their references, they are apt and specific. Though not without flaws, these papers will offer a convincing interpretation of the poem, as well as consistent control over the virtues of effective composition, including the language unique to the criticism of poetry. They demonstrate the writer’s ability to read perceptively and to write with clarity and sophistication.

7-6  These essays also demonstrate an understanding of ________’s poem; but, compared to the best essays, they are less thorough or less precise in their analysis of how the speaker / author uses _________ to convey _______________. In addition to minor flaws in interpretation, their analysis is likely to be less well-supported and less incisive. While these essays demonstrate the writer’s ability to express ideas clearly, they do so with less mastery and control over the hallmarks of mature composition than do papers in the 9-8 range.

5  While these essays deal with the assigned task without important errors, they have little to say beyond what is easiest to grasp. Their analysis of how ____________ conveys ____________ may be vague. As a critical explanation, they deal with the poem in a cursory way. Though the writing is sufficient to convey the writer’s thoughts, these essays are typically pedestrian, not as well conceived, organized, or developed as upper-half papers. They may reveal simplistic thinking of immature writing.

4-3  These lower-half essays often reflect an incomplete or over-simplified understanding of the poem. Typically, they fail to respond adequately to part of the question. Their analysis may be weak, meager or irrelevant, inaccurate or unclear. The writing demonstrates uncertain control over the elements of effective composition. These essays usually contain recurrent stylistic flaws and / or misreading, and they often lack persuasive evidence from the text. Essays scored 3 exhibit more than one of the above infelicities; they are marred by a significant misinterpretation, insufficient development, or serious omissions.

2-1  These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. Writers may seriously misread the poem. Frequently, these essays are unacceptably brief. They are poorly written on several counts and may contain many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. While some attempt may have been made to answer the question, the writer’s observations are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Essays that are especially inexact, vacuous, and / or mechanically unsound should be scored 1.

0  This is a response with no more than a reference to the task or no response at all.