**Writing Poetry Workshop**

Analyzing a Poem Objective: In this collection, you’ve focused on two important elements of literature—imagery and figurative language. In this Writing Workshop you’ll write an **analysis of a poem** in which you examine the poem’s elements to discover how those elements combine to convey the poem’s theme and overall effect.

**Prewriting****:** Choose and Analyze a Poem

**So Many Options**   The poem you select for analysis should be just right: not so short that it contains too little to examine, nor so long that you can’t cover it in detail in an essay of 1,000 words.

**The Poet’s Tools**   To analyze the poem you’ve selected, you’ll need to re-read it several times. As you re-read, pay close attention to the poem’s **literary elements.** Careful analysis of the elements used in a particular work will make you aware of how the poet uses those elements to shape meaning and create certain effects. Use the Element and Analysis Questions for your prewriting on the poem.

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| **Element** | **Analysis Questions** |
| **Speaker:** the voice talking in the poem; the narrator of the poem (not necessarily the poet) | Who is speaking in the poem? Is the speaker the poet or a character created by the poet? |
| **Theme:** the meaning, or main idea, of the poem, usually involving some insight into human existence | Does the poem examine some common life experience or problem? Does it suggest solutions or answers? |
| **Tone:** the poet’s attitude toward the subject, the audience, or a character | What is the poet’s attitude toward the subject (sarcastic, respectful)? the audience (friendly, hostile)? the characters (sympathetic, cruel)? |
| **Stylistic devices:** the techniques the poet uses to control language to create certain effects | How does **diction,** the poet’s choice of key words, influence the poem’s meaning?  Does the poet use **figurative language,** such as **metaphors** and **similes,** to make imaginative comparisons?  What **sound devices,** such as **rhythm, rhyme,** and **repetition,** does the poet use?  What effects do they have on the poem? |

**Practice and Apply #1**

Write your Element/Analysis Answers for your poem about the Speaker, the Theme, and the Tone.

**Stylistic/Literary Elements**

Identify one or more **key literary elements** that are essential to understanding the poem’s theme. Below you will find an analysis log one student created while analyzing the poem “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes. It shows the poem and some of the student’s notes on the poem’s stylistic devices—what he determined to be the key literary element.

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| **ANALYSIS LOG** | |
| 1   What happens to a dream deferred?  2  Does it dry up  3  like a raisin in the sun?  4  Or fester like a sore—  5  And then run?  6  Does it stink like rotten meat?  7  Or crust and sugar over—  8  like a syrupy sweet?  9  Maybe it just sags  10  like a heavy load.  11  *Or does it explode?* | **Line 1**         DICTION: “dream” = hope, aspiration for the future. “defer” = to delay temporarily, to give in to someone else.  **Lines 2–3**   SIMILE: Deferred dream shrivels.  **Lines 4–5**   SIMILE: Deferred dream becomes diseased, infected.  **Line 6**         SIMILE: Deferred dream stinks of decay.  **Lines 7–8**   SIMILE: Deferred dream is sickeningly sweet.  **Lines 9–10** SIMILE: Deferred dream is a burden; it weighs the dreamer down.  **Line 11**       METAPHOR: Deferred dream is a bomb that explodes and destroys.  Possible THEME: A dream deferred causes destruction. This is the answer to the poem’s question. |

**Practice and Apply #2**

Read your poem several times. Create an analysis log.

**Write Your Thesis**

**The Key Point**   Now, summarize your main idea about the poem in a coherent **thesis statement—**one or two sentences that make the focus of your analysis clear to your audience. The student analyzing “A Dream Deferred” wrote the following thesis statement while prewriting. He later fine-tuned it to better fit the introduction to his analysis.

In “A Dream Deferred,” Langston Hughes uses the stylistic devices of diction, figurative language, and sound to show that keeping people from achieving their dreams can have destructive consequences.

**Gather Supporting Evidence**

**The Poem as Witness**   An analysis of a poem should contain accurate **references** to the poem. These references—quotations from the poem and details restated in your own words—will support the thesis. Each reference should be followed by **elaboration:** an explanation of how the quotation or detail supports your thesis. Elaboration shows you have a good grasp of the poem’s **significant** **ideas** and enables you to address the poem’s **ambiguities, nuances,** and **complexities.**

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| **•** | **Ambiguities** are lines or words that lend themselves to more than one interpretation. (DICTION) |
| **•** | **Nuances** are changes in tone or meaning. For example, a poem might start with a light tone and then turn more serious. (TONE) |
| **•** | **Complexities** result when a poem is rich in meaning but difficult to interpret. For example, a poem may discuss problems that don’t have simple solutions, or ask questions that don’t have easy answers. (IDEAS) |

**Practice and Apply #3:**

Find AMBIGUITIES, words and lines with MORE THAN ONE INTERPRETATION:

Find CHANGES in TONE and MEANING:

Find COMPEX IDEAS:

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| **Literary Element** | **Detail or Quotation** | **Elaboration** |
| Stylistic device: Diction | “What happens to a dream deferred?” (1) | A dream can be a hope or an aspiration for the future. Defer is an ambiguous word. It can mean “to delay” or “to give in to what someone else wants.” |
| Stylistic device: Simile | “Does it dry up /like a raisin in the sun?”(2–3) | This is a complex image. The reader is meant to think of the dried and wrinkled raisin in contrast to the fat, juicy grape that the dream once was, before it dried up. |

**Practice and Apply #4**

Select 2 types of stylistic devices, find 2 quotations with proper format for each device, and write elaboration for each example.

**Practice and Apply #5**

Using the instructions at the start of this prompt, choose and analyze a poem. Then, decide on the poem’s key literary elements, write a thesis statement, and gather evidence to support the thesis. Organize your analysis.

**Organize Your Analysis**

**Putting Things in Order**   Before beginning your first draft, put your ideas in order. You might arrange your analysis by **order of importance,** beginning or ending with the key literary element most important to the poem’s theme and effect. You might also arrange your analysis by discussing the key literary elements in the order in which they appear in the poem. Read the model to see a way of writing the essay.

**Practice and Apply #6**

Write the rough draft of the essay. Make sure you use your Element Notes,

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| Writing Framework | | |
| |  | | --- | | **Introduction** | | * Grab readers’ attention by relating the poem’s meaning to experiences people have in common. * Introduce the poem’s title and author. * State your thesis, including the key elements and theme you will discuss. |  |  | | --- | | **Body** |  |  | | --- | | * Organize the key literary elements by order of importance or in the order in which they appear in the poem. * Discuss each key literary element. * Provide references for each key element, and elaborate on each key element. | | **Conclusion** | | * Remind readers of your thesis by restating it. * Summarize your main points. * Show how the poem relates to broader themes in life. | |  |  |

**Revising**

**Evaluate and Revise Your Draft**

**Rework and Refine**   Poets write and rewrite their poems, changing words and phrases until they find exactly the right meaning that rests in exactly the right words. As a writer, you may find that your first draft also may need a rewrite or two. To make your analysis of a poem as clear, precise, and effective as it can be, review your paper. Evaluate and revise the content and organization of your analysis first. Then, evaluate and revise its style.

**First Reading: Content and Organization**  The following chart will help you evaluate and revise your analysis. Answer the questions in the first column, check the tips in the second column, and look at the third column for suggestions.

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| Rubric: Analyzing a Poem | | |
| **Evaluation Questions** | **Tips** | **Revision Techniques** |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **1.** | Does the introduction mention the poem’s title and author? Does it include a clear thesis statement that names the key elements and the poem’s theme? | | **Circle** the poet, title, and thesis statement.**Put a check** **mark** next to the key elements and theme in the thesis statement. | **Add** a sentence that names the poem’s title and author. **Add** a clear thesis statement that names the key elements and the theme. |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **2.** | Does each body paragraph discuss a key literary element that supports the thesis? | | **Bracket** the key literary element in each body paragraph. | **Replace** body paragraphs that don’t address key elements. |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **3.** | Is each key literary element supported with references to the poem? Does the writer explain each reference? | | **Highlight** quotations or restated details from the poem, and **draw an arrow** to their explanations. | **Add** quotations or restated details.**Elaborate** by explaining how the quotations and details support the thesis. |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **4.** | Is the analysis organized by order of importance or in the order that the key elements appear in the poem? | | **Number** the body paragraphs. If the numbers do not reflect an appropriate sequence, revise. | **Rearrange** the body paragraphs in the order of importance or in the order the key elements appear in the poem. |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **5.** | Does the conclusion effectively remind readers of the thesis and summarize the main points? Does it show how the poem relates to broader themes in life? | | **Underline** the sentence in the conclusion that restates the thesis. **Put a star** beside the sentences that summarize the main points. **Put two stars**by the sentences that relate the poem to broader themes. | If necessary,**add** a sentence restating the thesis. **Add**sentences that summarize the main points and that relate the poem to broader themes. |

**Revising for Style: Eliminating Passive Voice**

**Second Reading: Style**    In your second reading, pay attention to your writing style and its impact on your tone. Sentences with wordy, unnecessary clauses can create a **tone** that intimidates readers. For example, note how clumsy the following sentence is: “What transpires when the achievement of what a person creates in the mind’s eye, what the person desires in reality, is postponed, and that postponement happens repeatedly?” Now, compare the stiff formality of that sentence to its rewrite: “What happens when the achievement of a dream is postponed—again and again?” Eliminating the unnecessary clauses improved the tone. Your analysis’s tone should be knowledgeable yet friendly, not intimidating. Use the following guidelines to help you cut down on wordiness.

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| Style Guidelines | | |
| **Evaluation Question** | **Tip** | **Revision Technique** |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | • | Does the analysis contain wordy sentences with unnecessary clauses? | | **Double underline**clauses beginning with*which is,* *which are, that is, that are,* *who is,* and *who are.* | **Reduce** half of these clauses to participles or participial phrases by **deleting** the pronouns *who, which,* or *that* and the *be* verb. If necessary, **rearrange** the remaining words. |

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| **ANALYZING THE REVISION PROCESS** |

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| Study these revisions, and answer the questions that follow. |

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| This revision model portrays a passage with revisions. |
| Responding to the Revision Process |

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| **1.** | How do the writer’s revisions improve the thesis statement? |
| **2.** | Why do you think the writer reworded the end of the sentence? |