

Recitation & Explication Essay

Part I: Recitation

Each student will theatrically present a 14-line (or more) poem at the end of our class meeting. We do this so each person has a chance to engage very closely with a poem and so classmates may hear how a poem sounds. Rehearsing the poem will allow you to discover the intertwining relationship between poetic structure and poetic meaning.

Selecting a Poem

Select a 14-line poem – or a few choice stanzas from a longer poem – based on the authors being covered on the day of your presentation. If you decide not to use one of the poems being discussed that day, use our anthology to find another. No two presenters may recite (or work on) the same poem. For this reason, you must inform me of your selection by the week prior (or more). The sooner you inform me of your poem, the more assured you will be that no one else has it.

Presentation:

For your presentation, you need to perform your poem using varying pitch, rate and volume of your voice. By emphasizing different words you may vary the meaning of the poem; but this meaning is up to you and your interpretative reading of the poem. If you decide to perform a selection from a very long poem, you need to locate the stanzas in the poem by summarizing the poem up to that point (taking less than a minute to do so). Before you begin, please let the audience know the title, author and page number of your poem. The following website has some excellent tips for performing poetry:

<http://www.poetryteachers.com/poetclass/performpoetry.htm>

Discussion:

After your recitation, lead a discussion regarding your poem (about 5 minutes). The topic can be centered around style, content, author, historical or cultural context. This should be a discussion instead of reading comments from a sheet of paper. For instance, ask your classmates a question or offer a provocative interpretation of the poem's meaning to incite discussion.

Part II: Explication (3pp + Works Cited)

A poetry explication is a relatively short analysis which describes the possible meanings and relationships of the words, images, and other small units that make up a poem. Writing an explication is an effective way for a reader to connect a poem's plot and conflicts with its structural features. (You'll notice that we will do this to every poem that we discuss in class.)

A poetry explication is an old-fashioned exercise designed to help students understand the relationship between poetic language and structure. For this essay, I ask you to look at a poem and write an essay about this relationship. You may not use any outside resources except a dictionary – this assignment is really about you and your poem.

Getting Started:

- Read through your poem once silently and once out loud
- Annotate features in your poem that stand out in your initial reading
- Begin to identify the different language being used
- Begin to identify the poetic structure being used
- Paraphrase the poem (i.e., write a summary in your own words)

Writing the Explication:

In an explication of a poem, it's important first to make a clear statement of thesis for your paper. In other words, what do you intend to argue that the poem means? Or what is the theme of the poem?

Here is an extensive definition of theme from *Literature and the Writing Process*: "Theme has been defined in many ways: the central idea or thesis [of a literary work]; the underlying meaning, either implied or directly stated; the general insight revealed by the entire story; the central truth; the dominating idea; the abstract concept that is made concrete through representation in person, action and image" (116). Essentially, your explication first will make an overall interpretation of the work by explaining the theme--what the work means. Remember that while there's no one correct answer about the theme of a work, it is possible to misread theme.

In the body of your paper, you will discuss the various literary elements of the poem that lead you to this interpretation. While you need not discuss every element of poetic analysis, you must provide clear and specific examples from the poem to back up your thesis, and every part of your paper should be devoted to proving that thesis. Be sure that each paragraph has a clear topic sentence, and is unified, dealing with only one topic per paragraph. You should quote liberally from the poem in providing evidence, as well. Your reading of the poem should be based only on your own interpretation; do not seek any critical material on the poem or poet, although you may certainly use dictionaries.

An explication is critical and interpretative. Do not summarize the poem; assume your reader already understands the basic situation of the poem. Explain instead the importance of the various elements in the poem that enable you to reach an understanding of the entire poem.

Turning In Your Explication

This explication essay is due ON THE DAY OF YOUR RECITATION at the beginning of class. Late papers will receive the penalization indicated on our syllabus. Failure to follow the below requirements will result in a lower grade. Please read them carefully!

- 3 pages, typed and double-spaced in 12pt font with one inch margins
- Works Cited page (outside of the 3 pages) in MLA format
- In-text citations in MLA style (parenthetical citation)
- Name, date, course and section number typed at the top left corner of the first page
- Name and page number typed in upper right corner of every page following the first page
- Staple the pages together. (DO NOT FOLD OR PAPERCLIP YOUR PAGES.)
- Proofread everything before you turn it in; there should be no spelling or typographical errors.

GRADING:

You will receive two grades for this assignment: **The first** will assess your Recitation performance and discussion, which will be based on the effectiveness of your recitation (familiarity, preparation, vocal inflections) and your ability to highlight particular aspects of the poem in an informal discussion. **A second grade** will be assigned to your Explication Essay, which will be based on your ability to communicate your ideas in a formal piece of writing (see the "Departmental Grading Policy" on the Syllabus).