

PRJ Your **Poetry Response Journal** should convince me that you have read and thought carefully about the assigned poems. To a limited extent, it is true that a poem means what the reader thinks it means; you must, however, be able to explain your interpretation by specific references to the poem.

If your understanding of the poem is “wrong,” yet your journal clearly proves that you read (or misread) the poem, you may well receive full credit. Your grade is based on what you have to say and how well you say it -- your personal reaction to the poem and your explanation of the logic that led to your interpretation.

Your grade is also based on following directions. I will not grade grammar and usage errors -- but to receive credit, you **MUST** include the following in every **PRJ**:

- ✓ the poem’s title in quotation marks
- ✓ the author’s name
- ✓ a quotation from the poem -- integrated with your own sentence, properly punctuated, and commented upon as necessary to show why you cited that particular line. **No Quote Lumps!**
- ✓ specific references to the poem
- ✓ careful thought

After you’ve included the five **MUSTs** above, you may choose any of these **MAYBEs** to guide your response. You may even choose the same one every time. Consider the possibilities of this “baker’s dozen” --

- [1] your opinion of the poem, good or bad, supported by specific references from the poem
- [2] an analysis of the poet’s persona, i.e. the poem’s speaker
- [3] a discussion of the title’s significance
- [4] a detailed response to a specific line or lines
- [5] a comparison to another poem, song, story, movie...
- [6] an examination of poetic techniques used, such as rhyme, rhythm, simile, metaphor, personification, allusion...
- [7] a close analysis of the poet’s diction, perhaps noting specific word choices, or connotation and denotation
- [8] a transformation of the poem to another form, such as a cartoon, a news story, a letter, a play, a soap opera, a commercial, perhaps a different form of poetry
- [9] an original poem developing in some way from the assigned poem
- [10] a paraphrase of the poem
- [11] a discussion of the writer's life and its relevance to the poem
- [12] a statement relating the poem to your experience or ideas
- [13] an explanation of problems you had in understanding the poem

Length: Approximately 1/2 to 1 page long for each **PRJ**

Format: Blue or black ink, front side of the paper only

Due: Beginning of the hour in the blue wire basket on my desk.

Quoting from a Poem

When you write about a poem or refer to a poem in a literary response journal or an essay, you will frequently need to quote from it. Below are some rules to follow when you quote the words or title of a poem. Examples given in the rules are taken from the poem by William Stafford on the back of this page.

RULE 1: *Whenever you mention the title of a poem, put quotation marks around it.*

In “Fifteen,” William Stafford uses the accidental discovery of an abandoned motorcycle to show the speaker caught between childhood and adulthood.

RULE 2: *Whenever you quote a word or phrase that appears in the poem, put quotation marks around it and INTEGRATE the quoted material within your own sentence.*

The boy describes the motorcycle as if it were alive, calling it his “companion, ready and friendly.”

RULE 3: *Whenever you quote a phrase that begins on one line but ends on the next, indicate where the first line stops by using A SLASH MARK.*

The speaker “indulged/a forward feeling, a tremble” as he is torn between mounting the motorcycle and riding away, or dutifully looking for its owner.

RULE 4: *Whenever you quote four or more lines, indent the passage from both margins, but do not use quotation marks. Cite such a long passage only if it is especially significant. Introduce the quotation, copy the lines EXACTLY as they are in the poem, and then explain the relevance of the citation afterwards.*

The speaker briefly indulges the childish fantasy of stealing the motorcycle and riding away. This moment, however, is truly a “bridge” between childhood and adulthood. Rather than daydream of freedom, he thinks about the situation and crosses over to responsibility. The speaker chooses to look for

the owner, just coming to, where he had flipped
over the rail. He had blood on his hand, was pale --
I helped him walk to his machine. He ran his hand
over it, called me good man, roared away.

This experience implies that being a grownup is dangerous, and perhaps even joyless. An adult, free to fulfill the speaker’s fantasy, risks real dangers. Stunned and wounded, the owner acknowledges the speaker’s maturity by calling him “good man.” Something magical has been lost, however, in the transformation. The motorcycle itself has changed from a “companion” to a lifeless “machine.”

ACTIVITIES: Use the poem by Sylvia Plath on the back of this page. Answer on a separate page.

1. Write a sentence that explains what this poem is about. Use the title of the poem and the writer’s name in your sentence.
2. In another sentence, point out a striking image or comparison in the poem. Quote a phrase, not a complete sentence. Integrate with your own words. NO QUOTE LUMPS!
3. In another sentence, cite an example of personification and explain what it reveals about the speaker. Quote a phrase that begins on one line and continues on the next.
4. In a sentence that contains at least three lines of the poem, comment on how those lines help reveal the poem’s meaning. Introduce the lines, quote exactly, and explain them afterwards.