



Essay Comments: Dunn Poetry Explication

Introduction/Thesis Statement

- Follow the rules for introductions: no full sentence quotations, no general truths about literature/life, no rhetorical questions. Start with something specific and engaging.
- The thesis statement in poetry explications needs to be a clear argument about what the poem means as a whole, in this case the progression that the poem illustrates.

Body of the Essay

- Topic sentences need to be arguments about what the poet is saying, not general statements about life/poetry. For example, compare the following topic sentences:
 - *When poets begin writing, they try to describe things clearly and precisely, and do not dive deep enough into personal emotions.*
 - *The first part of Dunn's poem explores concept of emotional vacancy in young writer's works.*
- You can't **summarize** what happens in parts of the poem; you need to **explicate** the poem. That means that the whole essay needs to explain how specific elements of the poet's language are used to create meaning. You can't generalize to explain what a section means.
- You've got to watch that you're not just listing the elements of the poem inside your paragraphs. For each part of the poem you discuss, you need to show **how/why** it means what you claim and how this piece relates to the paragraph/piece as a whole.
- Be careful about sections of the poem that address one theme. Rather than repeating that a section is about a 'lack of emotion,' find nuanced explanations. Assume that Stephen Dunn used multiple images and symbols to create different levels of meaning about the same theme.
- Use literary terms and poetic devices, when they are there. Most of you didn't include many, even when you were writing about them. Be sure to explain that imagery, symbolism, and metaphor are being used.
- At the beginning of paragraphs, parenthetically note the lines you intend to talk about in each section. For example: The opens (lines 1-14) with a description of..."
- Paragraph organization is always best if it is based not on specific items, but on sub-topics. Move from Dunn's description of inexperienced writing to clichéd work, rather than from one specific example to another.
- Decide what you are writing about. Many of you seemed to wander from poetry to emotions to the expression of emotion through poetry. Be clear in thesis statements and topic sentences about what your focus is.
- Better transitions. Try to avoid clichéd transitions like "In the first section..."
- A lot of you need to work on consistency of number. When you refer to a singular noun (poet) you can't use a plural pronoun (they) later.
- Hey, why not write a conclusion, especially if you haven't made the minimum requirement for the assignment?