

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following two poems are about Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, a Greek king. She 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 speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers' views of Helen.

To Helen

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad¹ airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche,² from the regions which
Are Holy-Land!

— Edgar Allan Poe

1. In Greek mythology, Naiads are water nymphs who live in lakes, rivers, springs, and fountains.

2. The personification of the human soul who married Cupid, the god of love.

Helen

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees, unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,

white ash amid funereal cypresses.

— H.D.: *Collected Poems, 1912-1944*. Copyright ©1982 by the Estate of Hilda Doolittle. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation. U.S. and Canadian rights only.

Scoring Guide: AP English Literature Question 2 (1994)

GENERAL DIRECTIONS: This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays you read, but for cases in which it seems problematic, consult your Table Leader. The score you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point from the score otherwise appropriate. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

9-8 These well-written essays clearly demonstrate an understanding of the contrasting views of Helen in the two poems. With apt and specific references, they analyze how such elements as point of view, diction, imagery, form and tone distinguish the speakers' views of Helen. Though not without flaws, these papers offer convincing interpretations of both poems; they demonstrate the writers' ability to read perceptively and to write with clarity and skill.

7-6 These essays also demonstrate an understanding of the different views of Helen in the two poems, but compared to the best essays, they are less thorough or less precise in analyzing the contrast with respect to such elements as point of view, diction, imagery, form, and tone. In addition to minor flaws in interpretation, their analysis is likely to be briefer, less well-supported and less incisive. These essays demonstrate the writers' ability to express ideas clearly, but with less mastery and control than do papers in the 9-8 range.

5 These essays are superficial. They contrast the views of Helen in the two poems, but typically they are pedestrian. They deal with the assigned task without important errors, but they have little to say beyond the obvious and easy to grasp. Their understanding of how such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone contribute to the views may be vague, mechanical, or inadequately supported. While the writing is sufficient to convey the writer's thoughts, these essays are not as well conceived, organized or developed as the upper half papers. Often they reveal simplistic thinking and/or immature writing.

4-3 These lower half essays fail to respond adequately to part or parts of the question. They reflect an incomplete understanding of the contrast between the two views of Helen, and/or their treatment of such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form and tone may be meager or unclear, inaccurate or irrelevant. The writing usually demonstrates uncertain control over the qualities of college-level composition. They usually contain recurrent stylistic flaws and/or misreadings and lack persuasive evidence from the text. These essays may paraphrase rather than analyze. Essays scored 3 exhibit more than one of the problems described above; they are marred by significant misinterpretations, insufficient development, or serious omissions.

2-1 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. They may seriously misread one or both of the poems. In addition, they are poorly written on several counts and may contain many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. Frequently, they are unacceptably brief. 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, ill-organized, illogically argued and/or mechanically unsound should be scored 1.

0 This is a response with no more than a reference to the question.

Indicates a blank response, or one that is unrelated to the assignment.

Sample WW 1

Often, poems are written on the same subject, and just as often the poets' opinions aren't always in agreement. One such example of this would be Poe's "To Helen" and Doolittle's "Helen."

Poe writes of Helen's beauty and how enchanted the speaker is by it. The speaker compares her beauty to what a "way-worn wanderer" sees as most beautiful; the ship that brought him home.

Sample A 2

Helen of Troy is renowned in the ancient world for her beauty. Although few renounce Helen's beauty, some denounce her instead of praising her for her beauty. The following shall contrast two different poems on Helen and show the contrast between the two viewpoints.

The first poem entitled To Helen by Edgar Allan Poe is one that captures the feeling of admiration for Helen's beauty. A beauty which he is thankful for. Because to him her beauty represents much more than physical attributes it everything he holds dear to him her beauty is a symbol of all that was glorious and good.

The second poem by a book of collected poems entitled Helen gives a vision of Helen which makes her every bit as beautiful but instead of her being held in admiration the poet holds her in contempt for her beauty for "past ills" and past "enchantments" by her beauty this poet feels she used her beauty for negative purposes and that is why he does not praise her beauty.

In conclusion there are two sides to every coin each individual sees a person in a different light a different connotation and so the contrast is quite obvious on two different perspectives on the same person.

Sample EE 3

The first contrast comes in the title. Poe's "To Helen", implying that the poem was written specifically for her to read. In H.D.'s the title is simply "Helen." It implies that the writer's statements were not a direct gesture but, as a public showing of his feelings. Poe's view of Helen is one of such beauty, that it's able to guide someone to such a state of love as to forget all of the wrongdoings and misfortune the person may have brought. In H.D.'s "Helen", there is also extreme feelings but, not love, hate.

Poe uses words as, thy beauty, gently, perfumed, and so on. H.D. uses hate, reviles, ills, and unmoved. Although they are both describing the same thing, her beauty. In other words, everything Poe writes as being beautiful and great; H.D. writes it as the reason why the whole war took place. H.D. is blaming the whole thing on her beauty.

Sample B 4

The two poems here offer two contrasting views of Helen of Troy.

The first poem "To Helen," the speaker is speaking or writing directly to Helen. Basically the speaker is praising Helen by comparing her to the wonders and beauty of nature. Helen is seen as a light which guides lost adventurers home to their native land. The speaker, possibly could be a lover or an admirer who is drawn by the smell of Helen's perfume. The speaker presents himself as being at the mercy of Helen when he sees her as a statue where he is at the bottom. The speaker also suggests that Helen is a goddess who should be paid homage. From the tone of the speaker, we get the impression that Helen is such a goddess that lowly men kneel at her feet.

The second poem "Helen" is completely the opposite of "To Helen." In this poem, the speaker expresses genuine hate for Helen and every thing she stands for. The first stanza basically depicts Helen as being completely lifeless; "still eyes" and "white hands" — all life drained from her body. Everyone knowing Helen hates her more when she tries to be kind by smiling. But these people know better, that it is all fake. In the final stanza, the speaker does not acknowledge her beauty but that's about it. He sees the outer physical beauty and nothing else for there is nothing else to see. The speaker thinks that Helen would do better good if she were dead. The speaker does not in any way acknowledge that she is even human, she is just something, an object something to use and throw away.

Sample X 4

The two poems concerning Helen of Troy deeply contrast in that one, Poe's, praises her beauty, and the other, H.D.'s, scorns her for what she caused. Truly, Helen was a beautiful creature that many fell for, yet, at the same time, she was the cause of the Trojan War.

First, is to examine Edgar Allan Poe's view of her, and then to contrast that in relation to Hilda Dolittle's view of her. Simply put, Poe greatly admires Helen's looks. He sees nothing but beauty in all of her. He speaks of nothing condescending concerning her, and in essence almost "worships the ground she walks on." His use of diction is highly influential to support his admiration. He uses classic, Greek terminology to depict her grandeur.

However, Dolittle has a slightly more dim view of her. The first line, "All Greece hates," starts the poem off on a note that can only get worse. It would seem that she holds Helen responsible for all that happened. Doolittle takes the position of speaking for Greece, which has a heavier effect than if she were just to speak for herself as Poe did. Dolittle's use of the word white appears four times. This is perhaps an attempt to take away from the beauty of Helen. Since white isn't really a beautiful color, the author hopes to instill this image into Helen, taking away from her grandeur.

Basically, Doolittle sums up her (and Greece's) attitude in the last three lines. That maid could indeed be loved only if she dead implies a rather harsh attitude that could not be more plainly revealed.

Sample H 5

In looking at the two poems about the infamous Helen of Troy, we will consider that there are two wholly different views of Helen represented and find that these contrasting views — the Helen who is loved and admired versus the Helen who is hated — are easily recognizable and readily distinguishable by each poet's ability to manipulate the elements of speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone. In Edgar Allan Poe's poem, "To Helen," Helen is extolled for what she is best renowned for — her beauty. The speaker, who describes her in a beautiful, poetic manner, admires her excessively for "[her] hyacinth hair [and her] classic face," (line 7). In contrast, the speaker in H.D.'s poem, "Helen," loathes her and is disgusted by her "white face," and "white hands" — the very features that are so enchanting and intriguing to the first speaker. In fact, he seems to hate her enough to say that she can and only will be loved "if she were laid, white ash amid funereal cypresses," (lines 17-18). On the other hand, the speaker in "To Helen," is so much in awe of her splendor that he wishes to immortalize her when he compares her to a statue-like being.

Besides the mere element of the speaker, tone style and imagery clearly define the individuality of each poem. In Poe's poem, the tone is one that echoes adoration, which is further expressed by the diction, poetic and beautiful. However, in H.D.'s poem, the tone is hateful, loathsome while the style is harsh, poignant, and cold.

Clearly, both Poe and H.D.'s capability of using the literary elements to their liking have defined the individuality of each poem: Helen as a beautiful and statue-like woman in Poe's poem and the same Helen as a hated and reviled woman in H.D.'s poem.

Sample N 6

Helen of Troy was certainly a renowned woman. She alone caused the Trojan War, the downfall of a great nation, and the death of thousands of men. But from this infamous persona have sprung great literature. Both Edgar Allan Poe and Hilda Doolittle have written poems about Helen of Troy and they are contrasted in their difference of speaker, diction, and tone.

The difference in the speakers of the poems can almost be differentiated in the title. Poe's work is entitled "To Helen" and he is literally speaking to her. Whereas in Doolittle's poem, the name Helen is mentioned but once — in the title which is merely "Helen."

The diction in the two poems are as opposite as night and day. In the first line of Poe's poem, he mentions Helen's great beauty. Doolittle talks about the hate that Greece feels for Helen. Doolittle also

discusses Helen's beauty, but as being pale and white: "the still eyes in the white face, the lustre as of olives where she stands, and the white hands." When Poe talks of Helen's beauty, he compares her to things alive such as the sea: "Like those Nicéan barks of yore, That gently, o'er perfumed sea." and "Thy Naiad airs." He writes of her hyacinth hair." Whereas Poe likens Helen to flowers, Doolittle compares her complexion to an olive, cool and lifeless. The diction of these two poems provides for great contrast in the life of Helen of Troy.

The tones of the two poems is perhaps where the greatest contrast lies. Poe writes as if he is actually speaking to Helen. His poem is like an ode, a toast to Helen. He flatters her and spouts of her beauty. Doolittle is much more reserved than Poe. Not only does she discuss Greece's hatred of Helen, but she does so in the same cool, calm manner that she discusses her beauty. While Poe seems to be practically gushing, Doolittle's tone is without emotion. Thus difference in tone serves as a big contrast between the two poems.

Both Poe and Doolittle saw Helen as a worthy topic of write to write. Their different opinions is a mark of how much of an individual activity writing is. Their differences in speaker, diction, and tone proved to show how wide the contrast was.

Sample L 6

While Poe idolizes the beauty and perfection of Helen, Doolittle curses the same and hints that only Helen's death would please her countrymen. The former poem makes use of soft language and pleasant images to lull the reader into agreement that Helen is the embodiment of goddess-like beauty. By contrast, the second poem utilizes harsh words, negative images, and curt phrases to convince the reader that Helen is plain where worth is concerned and also that her jealous countrymen would prefer her death.

It is evident that the speaker of the poem "To Helen" felt that she was worth the Greek losses in the Trojan War, while the speaker of "Helen" does not. The positive images used by Poe, such as "hyacinth hair" and "classic face", clash with the "wan and white" face which causes all of Greece to remember past ills. As Helen's beauty is like the wondrous effects of the Nicéan barks for Poe, Doolittle says that Greece is "unmoved" by the "beauty of cool feet And slenderest knees."

Poe is made happy by Helen's continued gracious existence; however, Doolittle's Greece could only love her ashes laid among the trees. Here, the Holy-Land", with its positive connotations, contrasts sharply with the "funereal cypresses" that herald Helen's death.

Diction is also very important to both poems. Poe's gently flowing passages that are so smooth-edged lull the reader into a feeling of warmth and security with Helen's beauty. Doolittle's short, choppy phrases keep the reader sharply uncomfortable and starkly aware of Greece's hatred of Helen. This diction helps lead to a negative tone, which is polarized by Poe's warm and glowing tone of admiration for Helen.

Sample O 7

Beauty is quite delicate; it can be a muse or a grounds for argument. Using contrasting perspectives, tones, and form, diction and imagery, Edgar Allen Poe and Hilda Doolittle find quite different qualities in the ancient character of Helen.

Edgar Allen Poe sees Helen as an inspiration. His poem is really an ode — he even addresses it "To Helen" (title). He sees her as a great light beckoning him home to "the glory that was Greece,/And the grandeur that was Rome" (9-10). She is a wondrous link to the past, to passion and beauty. In its direct plea, Poe's three stanzas are almost a prayer to an ancient goddess. She is the strength that bears him "Gently o'er a perfumed sea" (3), and her "hyacinth hair" (7) and "classic face" (7) are a magnet which he cannot resist. Her "statue-like" (12) beauty are a beacon Poe does not wish to refuse; he is as seduced and enchanted by Helen as were men of old.

Hilda Doolittle resents the power of Helen's magnetism. She observes Helen less as a judge of beauty that as a devastated Greek. Doolittle's three stanzas seem almost to be a chant of hate, a fairly direct death-wish for the former queen. The poet sees Helen's paleness with its olive lustre (3) eyes, but instead of being attracted she is repulsed. She clearly feels for Greece and "past ills" (11). Despite Helen's divine birth and "cool feet and slenderest knees" (14-15), devastated Greece can only wish she would burn purely, so that her "white ash [could be laid] among funeral cypresses" (18).

Poe is attracted by the same beauty which made Helem such a poisoned object in the past; Doolittle sees past Helen's exterior to the consequences of her magnetism and feels the pain of Menelaus's Greece. The details of the two poems allow the two poets to access their contrasting sentiments and provide two views of the Ancient beauty; her passionate, flowing nature could also bring hardship.

Sample II 9

In these two poems dedicated to the myth of Helen, the authors differ in their views of Helen. Edgar Allan Poe praises and worships the beauty of Helen. H.D. in contrast reviles her for her treachery and is unmoved by her beauty. Both poets use elements such as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone to make his point of view.

The first poem by Edgar Allan Poe is written in a lyric style with euphonic rhythm to his words. He uses apostrophe to address Helen as if she is standing on a pedestal before him when he says, "Helen, thy beauty is to me ..." Poe also employs similes such as "like to those Nicean bark ... bore to his own native land" to praise her for being the catalyst of the Trojan destiny. The poem is also in end rhyme and masculine rhyme to add to the harmonious flow of the words. The tone is praising and clearly worshipful as seen by the use "thy" & the descriptions of Helen as "thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face." Alliteration

such as "weary, way-worn wanderer" adds to the flow of the words and emphasizes the weariness of men searching for their destiny. The descriptions of Rome are of exhausted men coming "home" to the "grandeur that was Rome." In the last stanza, especially Poe introduces exclamations and repetitions of consonant and vowel sounds to praise Helen for her beauty and her role in the founding of great Rome.

However, in the next poem by H.D. the point of view is from the Greek perspective. Helen here is portrayed as a traitor to her country and not even her superficial beauty can enchant them anymore. Helen is described as "white" and words such as "ash" and "funereal cypresses" provoke an image of death — almost as if she has become a spirit to them, no longer corporeal, real, or youthful. It's as if the Greeks have matured and now learn the treachery behind the beauty. The whole poem is in end rhyme also, but the tone is bitter and disgusted. When the author says, "All Greece reviles the wan face when she smiles," it provokes an image of the country practically spitting with hatred and vengeance at the traitor. The repetition of the word "past" from line 10 and in line 11 and the contrast between "enchantments" and "ills" shows the readers how foolish the Greeks think themselves to have been as they look back to the events in the past. Also the way the poem is written, without any indentations and punctuation marks except for commas & a period at the end of each stanza, makes it seem as if Greece is such standing still — tall, stand, unbending, and immovable or penetrable. Each stanza also begins with "Greece", adding to the image of the country rejecting someone they had once openly embraced.

The two poems by Poe and H.D. have different views of Helen. Poe is worshipful and celebratory as he writes from his point of view of Troy and the great future Rome. H.D. writes from the Greek perspective and stands cold and distant from Helen. Each uses speaker, tone, diction, imagery, and form to emphasize his point of view. Poe sets Helen on a pedestal, while the Greeks stand immobile and look back to the little Helen and her treachery.

Sample R 8

The speakers' attitudes towards Helen differ in that Poe evokes her classical beauty and link to nature, while Doolittle seems to hate and revile her completely. Poe's nature imagery, use of punctuation, and lively rhyme scheme convey the joy he feels about Helen. Doolittle's poem is stark in contrast, as is his view of Helen; he uses parallel structure and desolate imagery to express his contempt for the weak, superficial Helen.

The first thing we notice about Poe's poem is that it is addressed literally "To Helen." Poe speaks directly to her, emphasizing her humanness and magnetism. In the first stanza Poe uses imagery of nature to convey his positive image of Helen. Barks and "perfumed sea" express this notion of Helen as a pseudo-earth goddess. The second deals with the extremes men go to to find love, and that love in general, symbolized by Helen, can help to stabilize one's life — or return to the balance and dignity of "Greece" and "Rome." The third is a joyful evocation of the sight of Helen, or again, love in general. The exclamation

points in this stanza emphasize the emotion and passion Poe feels for Helen. Overall the image of Helen we pick up is the classic, statue-like woman who is stable and human, even generating light — "the agate lamp" — from her very presence. The rhyme scheme helps the poem flow easily and keeps it upbeat; the last words in the second, third, and fifth lines of each stanza rhyme, helping express the joyful rhythm and positive view on the part of the poet.

In contrast to Poe's poem, full of life, is Doolittle's stark and desolate tone, which contributes to her view of Helen as too beautiful and shallow. This poem is not directly addressed to Helen; the poem in this case feels no connection to the famous lady but instead despises her. The first stanza is five lines long, the next six, and the last seven. This rational progression of gradually building contempt contrasts to Poe's lovely, spirited composition. The repetition of the words "wan" and "white" (4 times) stresses the lack of character in Helen, as well as her lack of color or substance. "Cool feet" and "tenderest knees" do not "move" Greece, because these are merely external things. Each stanza is a single sentence. There are no exclamation points, nor any rhyme scheme. The poem seems to be nearly strangled of energetic feeling; its tone conveys cold disapproval. The parallel structure, in which "All Greece" is repeated at the beginnings of the first and second stanzas, serves to emphasize the solid, flat, emphatic hatred of Helen. This hatred is so extreme that the poem closes by mentioning that she could only be loved if she were buried as "white ash." The disapproval is so extreme it seems hard to believe it could be directed against a single woman from antiquity. Perhaps Doolittle, a modern woman, is trying to make a disparaging statement about the traditional "ladylike" woman who lacks any substance or personality, striving only for beauty and marriage.

At any rate, the contrasting views of Helen are clearly expressed through appropriate imagery, structure, and tone.

Sample F 9

The first poem by Edgar Allan Poe is a profession of love for Helen's beauty, whereas the second poem is a statement of the hate caused by Helen's beauty.

The Poe passage, written in the first person, uses very careful diction to exalt Helen's beauty. Adjectives like "gently ... perfumed" describing the sea to which Helen is compared, communicate a quality of serenity and calmness inherent in her beauty, as does the alliteration of "weary, way-worn wanderer."

The imagery of the narrator "long wont to roam [on desperate seas]" gives the reader a sense of isolation and loss, until Helen's beauty "brought me home" to comfort and luxury and familiarity. The description of Helen's beauty is also present in images like "hyacinth hair," "classic face" and "Naiad airs," which recall "the grandeur that was Rome," and "the glory that was Greece." For the speaker, Helen is a source of comfort and glory and majesty.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter, for the most part, and divided into five line stanzas with a gradually constant rhyming pattern. The stability and order of such a literal arrangement provides the perfect atmosphere in which to pay homage to Helen's beauty.

The tone is one of infatuation and romance, particularly noticeable in the comparison of Helen to "Psyche, from the regions which / are Holy-Land."

In the second poem, this time written in the third person, the speaker's diction is very ironic. He, too, describes Helen's beauty with phrases such as "beauty of cool feet," "slenderest knees," and "the white face." But they are used to a different end. These professions of beauty serve to remind the Greek people of "past ills," and they consequently hate Helen.

The images of beauty are used for the same ironic effect. Her face growing "wan and white," causes the Greeks to hate her face "deeper still." The fact that she is "God's daughter, born of love," increases Greece's loathing. The final, very unsettling image of Helen as "white ash among funereal cypresses," does not leave much ambiguity for the reader. It is clear that, according to the author, Greece would like to see Helen dead.

The poem is written with inconsistent meter, inconsistent stanza length (one is five lines, one is six lines and the last is seven lines) and inconsistent rhyming pattern. Furthermore, the rhymes are not quite perfect rhymes; "still-ills," "unmoved-love," and "feet-knees." All of these qualities make the reader feel disconcerted and not quite at ease. This is the atmosphere in which the author can convincingly insult Helen and her beauty.

The speaker's tone is ironic, sarcastic, and harshly bitter. His point is that Helen's beauty is the reason Greece was ravaged by war and suffering. Therefore, the Greeks have cause to hate her, not love her.

Sample PP 9

The heroine status of Helen of Troy has been debated throughout mythic history. The two poems about Helen reveal two completely conflicting views of her. While Poe establishes Helen as a beautiful heroine to be admired and longed for, H.D. shows the hate and enmity for Helen's deceit. The completely different styles of the two poems both emphasize the contrasting views and also contribute to each persona's opinion of Helen. [The style of the poems reflect the content and contribute to the poems' themes.] They different stylistic elements and figurative language in each poem stress the differing interpretations of Helen of Troy.

Poe's style and structure contributes to the persona's romantic notions of Helen of Troy. The diction is lofty and archaic setting an atmosphere of mythic and classical romances and chivalry. The poem has a rather strict form and adheres to poetic conventionalism. The rhyme scheme varies per stanza but the

rhyme contributes to an ode-like romantic tone. The poem is rhythmic and the meter is basically iambic tetrameter, but it is broken to emphasize Helen's beauty & uniqueness. The form of the poem and convention establishes the poem as a romantic appeal to Helen (in the form of an apostrophe to her lover). The poem also follows the convention of a dramatic monologue, for the speaker is definitively not the poet and the persona speaks to Helen who isn't there.

H.D.'s style and structure by contrast emphasizes her persona's completely different perception of Helen. Her diction is plain yet educated. There is rhyme but the rhyme scheme changes, and she also creates slant rhyme emphasizing the distaste for Helen. The slant rhyme and innovative form (undercut) undermine notions of Helen's purity because the poem itself is not pure. The rhyme is also enjambed which emphasizes key words such as "hates" and allows the poem to flow more cohesively. The innovation in rhyme and form signify that the poem's style equals the content. H.D.'s style is more modern as are the persona's notions of Helen. Another aspect of modernism in the poem is the myth as an arbitrary means of ordering art, and here H.D. actually uses the myth of Helen, not just the myth of human behavior to order her art and to contribute to her theme.

Poe's figurative language contributes to the persona's overall tone and to the theme of Helen's grace and beauty. Poe alludes throughout the poem to past history and myth stressing the ancient, classical beauty of Helen. He uses female metaphors throughout such as the sea to stress Helen's femininity. The persona speaks of his love for Helen by comparing himself to a wanderer away from his shore or away from Helen. Poe is invariably alluding to Home, for Odysseus is known by the epithet "way-wanderer." Helen could either be Odysseus' wife whom he longs to return to, or she could be the sirens, dangerously calling to Odysseus and threatening his death. Hence the speaker's desire is so strong for Helen it almost overcomes him. As the persona roams like a sailor on the sea he thinks of Helen's fair face. He claims that she brought Greece's glory and Rome's grandeur. Through her beauty Helen is both powerful and majestic. Then in the last stanza Helen holds a lamp, perhaps the torch of victory. The light symbolizes the persona's love for Helen, which becomes something holy and sacred through: "Holy-Land." This land is where the persona comes home to find Helen's love and beauty, as similarly the soldiers came home from the war.

In contrast, H.D.'s innovative figurative language emphasizes the persona's antipathy for Helen. She begins with a general statement that all of Greece despises Helen. Her metaphor of Helen's "lustre" to olives is interesting. "Olives" evokes a classical, mythical image, yet Helen wouldn't want to be shining like an olive. H.D. continues the poem with other awry images and puns, stressing the persona's distaste. H.D. achieves modernish detachment of the narrator through her generalities. Greece "reviles" Helen for her past evils and deceptions on the people of Greece. Greece, itself, is personified through metaphors, and, therefore, the persona stresses the broad scope of hatred for Helen. "Greece sees" is a pun on sees. For Greece not only realizes her deception, but her deceptions are based on the sea. Interestingly, Helen is God's daughter, yet Greece is unmoved [?] by any spirituality unless she is dead. "Laid" is another pun, but all Greece desires is not Helen's beauty but her death.

The intellectual complexity of each poem contrasts sharply. Poe's irony is achieved through a dramatic monologue or an apostrophe, and through his rich language revealing an unsatiable yet futile love for Helen. He also stresses a nostalgic yearning for the past & an unattainable ideal (Helen). H.D.'s intellectual complexity is achieved through the paradoxes

AP Language and Composition
1994 - Question #1

The passage below is a series of excerpts from an essay about England's King Charles II (1630-1685) by Sir George Savile, a member of Charles's Privy Council. Many in Savile's audience thought of Charles mainly as a lover of pleasure.

Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you define the attitude toward Charles II that Savile would like his readers to adopt and analyze the rhetorical strategies Savile employs to promote that attitude.

A prince neither sharpened by his misfortunes whilst abroad, nor by his power when restored, is such a shining character that it is a reproach not to be so dazzled with it as not to be able to see a fault in its full light. It would be a scandal in this case to have an exact memory. And if all who are akin to his vices should mourn for him, never prince would be better attended to his grave. He is under the protection of common frailty, that must engage men for their own sakes not to be too severe where they themselves have so much to answer.

What therefore an angry philosopher would call lewdness, let frailer men call a warmth and sweetness of the blood that would not be confined in the communicating itself; an overflowing of good nature, of which he had such stream that it would not be restrained within the banks of crabbed and unsociable virtue....

If he loved too much to lie upon his own down bed of ease, his subjects had the pleasure during his reign of lolling and stretching upon theirs. As a sword is sooner broken upon a feather bed than upon a table. so his pliantness broke the blow of a present mischief much better than a more immediate resistance would perhaps have done....

If he dissembled, let us remember, first, that he was a king, and that dissimulation is a jewel of the crown; next, that it is very hard for a man not to do sometimes too much of that which he concludeth necessary for him to practice. Men should consider that, as there would be no false dice if there were no true ones, so if dissembling is grown universal, it ceaseth to be foul play, having an implied allowance by the general practice. He that was so often forced to dissemble in his own defense might the better have the privilege sometimes to be the aggressor and to deal with men at their own weapon.

Subjects are apt to be as arbitrary in their censure as the most assuming kings can be in their power. If there might be matter for objections, there is not less reason for excuses; the defects laid to his charge are such as may claim indulgence from mankind.

Should nobody throw a stone at his faults but those who are free from them, there would be but a slender shower.

What private man will throw stones at him because he loved? Or what prince because he dissembled?...

The truth is, the calling of a king, with all its glittering, hath such an unreasonable weight upon it that they may rather expect to be lamented than to be envied for being set upon a pinnacle, where they are exposed to censure if they do not do more to answer men's expectations than corrupted nature will allow.

It is but justice therefore to this Prince to give all due softenings to the less shining parts of his life, to offer flowers and leaves to hide, instead of using aggravations to expose, them.

Let his royal ashes then lie soft upon him, and cover him from harsh and unkind censures; which though they should not be unjust, can never clear themselves from being indecent.

AP Literature 1993

Question 1

40 Minutes

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.

The Centaur

The summer that I was ten—
Can it be there was only one
summer that I was ten? It must

have been a long one then—
each day I'd go out to choose
a fresh horse from my stable

which was a willow grove
down by the old canal.
I'd go on my two bare feet.

But when, with my brother's jack-knife,
I had cut me a long limber horse
with a good thick knob for a head,

and peeled him slick and clean
except a few leaves for the tail,
and cinched my brother's belt

around his head for a rein,
I'd straddle and canter him fast
up the grass bank to the path,

trot along in the lovely dust
that talcumed over his hoofs,
hiding my toes, and turning

his feet to swift half-moons.
The willow knob with the strap
jouncing between my thighs

was the pommel and yet the poll
of my nickering pony's head.
My head and my neck were mine,

yet they were shaped like a horse.
My hair flopped to the side
like the mane of a horse in the wind.

My forelock swung in my eyes,
my neck arched and I snorted.
I shied and skittered and reared,

stopped and raised my knees,
pawed at the ground and quivered.
My teeth bared as we wheeled

and swished through the dust again.
I was the horse and the rider,
and the leather I slapped to his rump

spanked my own behind.
Doubled, my two hoofs beat
a gallop along the bank,

the wind twanged in my mane,
my mouth squared to the bit.
And yet I sat on my steed

quiet, negligent riding,
my toes standing the stirrups,
my thighs hugging his ribs.

At a walk we drew up to the porch.
I tethered him to a paling.
Dismounting, I smoothed my skirt

and entered the dusky hall.
My feet on the clean linoleum
left ghostly toes in the hall.

Where have you been? said my mother.
Been riding, I said from the sink,
and filled me a glass of water.

What's that in your pocket? she said.
Just my *knife*. It weighted my pocket
and stretched my dress awry.

Go tie back your hair, said my mother,
and *Why is your mouth all green?*
Rob Roy, he pulled some clover
as we crossed the field, I told her.

—May Swenson

* A creature in Greek mythology that had the body of a horse and the head and torso of a man.

General Directions: This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays you read, but in cases in which it seems problematic, consult your Table Leader. The score you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point from the score otherwise appropriate. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than 3.

9-8 These well-written essays clearly demonstrate an understanding of the poem and the imaginative experience it describes. With apt and specific references, they discuss how language, imagery and/or structure are used to convey meaning in the poem. They might define how the multiple perspectives convey meaning by recognizing, for example, the difference between the richly imaginative world of youth and the starkly literal world of the adult. Though not without flaws, these papers will offer a convincing interpretation of the poem and consistent control over the elements of composition. They demonstrate the writer's ability to read perceptively and to write with clarity and skill.

7-6 These essays also demonstrate an understanding of the poem, but compared to the best essays, they are less thorough, or less precise in handling the relation of the multiple perspectives to meaning. In addition to minor flaws in interpretation, their discussion of language, imagery and/or structure is likely to be briefer, less well-supported and less incisive. These essays demonstrate the writers' ability to express ideas clearly, but with less mastery and control than the 9-8 papers.

5 These essays are characterized by superficiality. Their handling of language, imagery and structure may be vague, mechanical or inadequately supported. They deal with the assigned tasks without important errors, but they miss the complexity of the childhood experience the body of the poem describes. Though they are aware of perspective, they deal with it in only the most cursory way. The writing is sufficient to convey the writer's thoughts, but these essays are typically pedestrian, not as well conceived, organized or developed as the upper-half papers. Often they reveal simplistic thinking and/or immature writing.

4-3 These lower-half essays may reflect an incomplete understanding of the poem. Typically, they fail to respond adequately to part or parts of the question. The treatment of language, imagery and structure may be weak, meager, or irrelevant. The discussion of perspectives and meaning may be inaccurate or unclear. The writing demonstrates shaky control over the standard elements of composition. These essays usually contain recurrent stylistic flaws and/or misreadings and lack of persuasive evidence from text. Essays scored 3 exhibit more than one of the above infelicities; they are marred by significant misinterpretations, insufficient development, or serious omissions.

2-1 These essays compound the weaknesses of papers in the 4-3 range. They may seriously misread the poem. Frequently, they are unacceptably brief. They are often poorly written on several counts, and may contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. While some attempt may have been made to answer the question, the writer's views are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence.

0 This is a response with no more than a reference to the poem.

- Indicates a blank response, or is completely off-topic.

Centaur Sample KKK

Tim Averill, Consultant

Was May Swenson on drugs when she wrote this poem? My guess is, yes she had to be. Only in my weirdest dream, I would turn into a horse and if a dream like that ever occurred, I wouldn't tell anyone,

much less write a poem, that would eventually be used on an AP exam. I am sure the poem has some literary merit, and some popint that I will never realize, but my job is to write about the poem not complain. So as I embark on task I noticed that Ms. Swenon uses a rhetorical question concerning her age and the number of times she ventured through the age of ten. She also uses what one might personifaction, but since it is her taking on horse-like characteristics I have decided to call it horsifaction. I know what happen to May Swenson. She probably had just finished reading Gullivers Travels, and wanted to become a rational Yahoo, and the only way for her to do this was to write a poem about it.

Centaur Sample Z

Tim Averill, Consultant

This poem has meaning for me in the memories it brings to my head. When I was the same age as the girl in this story, I would, like she did, ride my horse through the willow trees. I would not remember my past so clearly, though, if May Swenson hadn't used such vivid description in her poem.

The author's most powerful skill in helping me remember is her use of imagery. I can clearly see the girl making her horse, riding it all around, and then coming home dirty and excited. I love the picture of "the lovely dust that talcumed over [the horse's] hoofs, hiding [the girl's] toes and turning [the horse's] feet to swift half-moons." I also love seeing the girl come home to the dark house, all dirty, and saying to her mother that her mouth is green because the horse "pulled some clover as [they] crossed the field."

Another aspect of this poem that helps me relate to it and find meaning is the point of view that's used. Because the woman who is describing the summer of horse-riding actually experienced the event, we can think her thoughts and feel what she felt. If her mother or another bystander told us the story, we would miss the whole experience. Only the girl can give us every detail, and help me remeber my own adventures.

Centaur Sample Q

Tim Averill, Consultant

In the poem "The Centaur" various elements, including language, imagery, and structure, combine with the speaker's point of view to express the general meaning of the poem.

The poet, May Swenson, uses simple, common language to portray the childish innocence of the young girl as she pretends she is a rough, rugged horse rider, galloping through her "willow grove."

The language used by Swenson creates the image of a carefree youngster, content in mere imagination of first riding her "long, limber horse," which she created by using her "brother's jack-knife" and "belt," and later pretending she actually was a horse, as she "swished through the dust." She was "the horse and the rider;" "my two hoofs beat" "the wind twanged in my mane."

Swenson uses descriptive adjectives to show similarities between the girl and the horse. The girl says her "head and neck were mine, yet they were shaped like a horse." The author compares the girl's hair to the mane of a horse, "flopping to the side like the mane of a horse in the wind." The girl "snorts," "neck arched," as she "shied and skittered and reared."

The structure of the poem, with distinct groupings of three lines, is characteristic of the girl's horse ride. It seems to create a picture of her galloping, the separate contact of the hooves with the ground, incorporated with a short pause (the breaks in between the three-line groupings) when the horse is galloping through the air.

The poem is told from the point of view of the young girl, who is now much older, reminiscing of the trouble-free days when she was ten, a child yearning to be let loose, to be free as a horse, only to be held back by her mother's constant nagging "where have you been?" and expecting her to act as a lady, "go tie back your hair."

May Swenson combines several literary devices along with a simplistic, expressive attitude to create a picture of the ten-year-old girl on her "horse."

Centaur Sample RRR

Tim Averill, Consultant

In May Swenson's poem, "The Centaur," a young girl's identity fiercely roams from rider to ridden, from horse to human to a thing in-between, In the persona's imagination, truth is as fluid as her shifting flesh; a green mouth remains of the centaur, but a residue of the centaur's archetypal wildness also stains the girl. The structure of the poem, constructed in stanzas which interrupt and conclude each other, shows the shifting, changeable nature of the girl-horse. The language is the language of imaginative youth, and brings out a casual, headstrong personality that does honor to the image of the centaur. The imagery, centered so forcefully on the horse-girl nexus, prevents any mistaken attempts to pin the persona's identity to a fixed hardpoint of acceptable realism. The first person narration internalizes the changes, making the an act of description from a centaur, an pen letter from a wild and freakish creature.

The self-consciousness of the personal (in a connotation-free, unembarrassed sense) is depicted by the first person point of view. That the girl may stand back from her older years, and that the older persona may freely describe her younger version, signifies the intenseness of identity found in this individual. "Can it be there was only one summer that I was ten? It must have been a long one then" shows the not-confused but mentally fluid nature of the woman; her identity is not cut from a crystalline block of lucid memory, but rather from intensely expressive shards for which carbon dating fails. To the persona, who from the vantage point of later years can see that the jack-knife "stretched my dress awry," identity is not as solid as some may think, and a girl can be a girl and a horse on a nice summer day, and she can be both.

The imagery is tremendously potent in effecting the transformations. The poem's riding imagery begins with the girl cutting herself a horse from the tree, clearly a rider, a human being. The imagery begins to lose definition and acquire a melting sort of reality when she trots and dust "...talcumed over his hoofs, hiding my toes, and turning his feet to swift half-moons." The symbiotic gestalt of girl and horse acquires a simile-like nature first, for the two fragments of identity must resemble each other before they subsume each other in identicalness. "My head and my neck were mine, yet they were shaped like a horse." The transformation is complete in the next stanza, or at least one stage of it is done, that from girl to horse: "My forelock swung in my eyes, my neck arched and I snorted." The poem's climax comes when the centaur is born: "The leather I slapped to his rump spanked my own behind." The images of the ghostly toes and the green mouth demand that the afternoon of melding not be forgotten, that the lesson in identity-swapping not be forgotten.

The language used by the poet shows the tomboyish willingness to imagine outlandish things and to defy convention, whether it be a definable identity of a girl or horse, or the mother's dictum, "Go tie back your hair." This casual wildness is found in the girl's westernish language: "cut me a long limber horse," "Been riding," and "Just my knife," are throwaway lines that show an easy familiarity with the attraction of being a girl or a horse, and an easiness of self. The diction is also influenced by a tomboyish love of westerns, such as the presence of riding vocabulary "nickering," "canter," "shied," "skittered," "reared," show that while the persona is a horse or centaur for the day, she is always a rider, defining what she cannot express as a horse, in human terms.

The structure of the poem is fast and loose. Sentences flow from one stanza to the next, rendering it impossible to pin down a definite place of transition, a definite stage in the persona's transformation. The stanzas are always three lines long, but the content is loosely packed. The structure is rigid, but the substance is fluid, a crystal lattice being washed through with identity. This represents the mercurial nature of identity and its elusiveness, its unwillingness to be typed or stuck in a rut.

"The Centaur" is a poem about identity, about a stubborn refusal to collar oneself, to tether oneself to an absolute. Even if the girl does tie up her horse for the day, her green mouth and wild mane still betray her as a centaur, half of whom is quietly hiding, waiting to spring from dormancy into full realization on tomorrow's ride.

Centaur Sample SSS

Tim Averill, Consultant

Only by analyzing the symbolism of the centaur can one truly understand this poem by May Swenson. It is not merely a poem about a girl and her imaginary horse, it is a poem that explores the basic dichotomies of life: male versus female, the child versus the adult, and the human versus the animal.

The Centaur is a creature in Greek mythology with the body of a horse and the head and torso of a man. The centaur is a physical representation of the blending together of two completely different things. It is the dichotomies within our own life that this little girl wishes to destroy when she turns herself into the Centaur.

The basic human dichotomy in life is male versus female. Distinctively and physically, they are very different, yet often times the boundaries between them become blurry. This is the case of this little girl. She likes to run in the fields and do the things usually done by boys. In the final stanza we learn why this is impossible for her. Her mother will not allow her to step away from the traditional functions and roles of women. By making her tie back her hair her mother is also forcing the little girl to tie back all of her physical and masculine instincts.

Another human dichotomy is between the child and the adult. Pablo Picasso said, "Every child is an artist. The problem is to remain one when you grow up." This girl obviously has a tremendous imagination. She has a great capacity for entertaining herself and has an artistic mind that allows her to make playmates out of nothing. Yet once again the influence of the mother is detrimental, this time to the artistic nature of the child. From the mother's stern and uncomprehending words we see that she is also trying to check her daughter's imagination. She would prefer her doing the menial and mundane functions of the household rather than have her playing in the fields, utilizing her imagination.

The final dichotomy of this poem and of life is that of the human versus the animal. Evolved from the the animals which surround us, though physically we differ, mentally we still have similar instincts. In the imagery (lines 29-48) when the girl describes her transformation into the Centaur she expresses bare and animal-like tendencies. It is only in this state that this girl can be free from the criticism and hampering of her mother. It is only in the field that she feels free to behave as she feels. Not as a girl, not as a child, not even as a human being, but as a living being responding to its basic instinctive natures.

It is by analysing this poem this way that the poem acquires universal themes. The mother becomes society and the girl all of us. How many times have girls been called "tomboys" and boys "sissies" and "faggots"? How many times have parents and society hampered creativity and imagination by scolding a child's curiosity or games? And, how many times has society shunned animal-like tendencies such

as eating with bare hands, fighting or sex? This is not the problem of one little girl growing up, but the problem of mankind versus its internal conflicts.

By making the poem in 1st person and in the past tense, May Swenson gives an optimistic air to the poem. Since she probably wrote this as an adult, judging by the language, Swenson shows that as an adult she still has the imagination and creativity to write such a poem. By writing such a poem, seemingly autobiographical, Swenson proudly displays her masculine and animal-like tendencies and challenges anyone to scorn them.

Centaur Sample Key

Tim Averill, Consultant

The following essays are the ones we used to calibrate ourselves at the reading this year. The scores were established at the meeting of the Question Leader and the Table Leaders. The order in which you present the groups of samples is important. Try to make clear and easy distinctions first, then give the readers/students the harder comparisons.

Group One:

- D 6 - Shallow analysis, but thorough writing.
- R 2 - Poorly written.

- P 4 - Watch out, penmanship can deceive you!
- N 8 - Well-written.

Group Two:

- F 9 - Top-flight writing.
- E 1 - Misreads dramatic situation very badly.

- J 7 - Paper need not be long to be good.
- L 3 - Perspective analyzed incorrectly. No tension in poem.

Group Three:

- A 5 - Bland.

Group Four:

- KKK 1 - Comic Relief.
- RRR 9 - A hint of what is possible.

Group Five:

- Z 2 - Reader response, that wretched beast!
- Q 7 - Another attempt to find a good 7 (barely there) :(
- SSS 9 - My personal favorite 9 in the reading!

The College Board
Tim Averill, Consultant

1993 *The Centaur* Bloopers and Other Delights

The following is a collection of student writings on May Swenson's *The Centaur*, which was Question 1 on the 1993 Advanced Placement Examination in English Literature and Composition.

BAD OPENING (and all too typical):

In May Swenson's poem, The Centaur, she makes use of language, imagery, structure, and point of view in order to convey meaning.

[The first sentence is so important. As I read 220 essays a day, I am reminded of the importance of telling my students to make sure that the first sentence declares their authority as writers.]

Some Wild Titles

- Title: "Along for the Ride"
- Title: "A Horse is a Horse, Of Course..."
- Title: The Desire of Youth

Welcome Back, Mrs. Malaprop

Throughout the poem an illicit conceit is used about the child's fascination about becoming mixed with a horse.

"illiteration"

A TREE-LINED STANZA

As the girl mounted her brother,

After she peeled the stick, it was equinified.

"Monoslavic words"

"a livid portrayal"

The speaker becomes so absolved in her imaginary world that she goes on to say, "My hair flopped..."

The centaur is a creature which is half-hore, half man.

Ms. Swenson recalls a time when she was ten years old and pretending to be a mystical centaur.

Reader Response can be Dangerous to your Health

[The prevalence of reader response© "One can see," "the reader can feel," "Makes me remembers when..."]

© Linoleum, although not a place like a willow grove or stable, conjures up an image of home to the reader, thereby inviting the reader to recount his/her own personal memories of days gone by.

© I for one never really enjoyed horseback riding but on the other hand I never really cared too much about identifying myself as a horse.

© I could feel the pony under me. I rode along the bank, the poem wasn't words, it was a visualization.

© Swenson's stylistic devices allow the reader to be young and experience a relationship with an animal.

- © One can actually feel the limb hitting their inner thighs as they grasp the reins and lift their knees in imitation of a trot.
- © The use of horse diction allows the reader to see the creative imagination the girl has.
- © You can feel summer barefoot but you cannot with shoes on.
- © To begin with, the language is quite simple. It is as if I can hear what she is thinking.
- © The imagery in the poem makes the reader become a part of the girl's fantasy world instead of only telling the reader about it.
- © How unfortunate I am to have never experienced a summer when I was just ten. [The writer then goes into an elaborate discussion of the vicissitudes of a midsummer birthday.]

Say What????

.... making it easier for us to walk a mile in her hooves.

The summers when adults were ten were long ones.

The structure of the poem first introduces the enthusiasm encountered by reading it.

The poet begins with the speaker trying to figure out is she was ten for more than one summer.

It is practically a universal fact that there is some sort of bond between females and horses.

Instead of curry combing him, she "peeled him slick and clean" to ready him.

When she returns to her human self once again there's still a little horse residue of Rob Roy in her from the time that she and Ron enjoyed nibbling clovers in the afternoon.

Picturing the girl riding a centaur is amazing.. It is surprising that she did not expect the creature to be dangerous.

However, from the implication it would seem that the girl's mouth would be green if she had the horse's bit in her mouth.

Only a centaur knows the real excitement of riding a horse.

She killed and skinned the horse to make a centaur costume. This is wrong, even for a poet.

The word limber gives the reader a clue to the horse's existence, for there aren't many limber horses that I know of, that can withstand the physical exertion of a human body; especially all the things revealed in this poem.

As she imagined slapping the horse, she felt her own behind being spanked, too. The young girl's imagination is her power to freedom and fun.

Since everyone since Wordsworth has known that adults cannot recapture their childhood, a poem like this can be refreshing and delightful to those that may have forgotten what it is like to be a child.

The rhetorical question, "Can it be only one summer when I was ten?" lends magic to the year, stretching it to the pinnacle of childhood powers.

The strap "jouncing between my thighs" is a tactile image, truly appreciated by anyone who has ridden a horse -- or perhaps imagined a ride.

"The Centaur" chronicles a young girl's imagination that she is riding a horse when actually she herself is a horse.

May Swenson conveys clearly through her poem, "The Centaur," that she was actually the human part of a centaur during the summer that she was ten.

Point being, the character in the story was a little girl. But the story is told this way to keep the reader from developing a bias based upon sex. Many people would be put off by a girl in a dress devouring clovers in a field while it would be okay for a boy.

This technique allows the reader to become personal with the characters in the poem.

The references to the boy's "dress" cause the reader to suppose that the horse ride does not take place in America.

This poem would not have been nearly as endearing if we did not know that the child was not only imagining a horse, but becoming one herself.

Through the use of simple and quite plain words, the author of "The Centaur" is able to efficiently denote the poem's essence, which is seemingly one of nature's relation to man, with special reference to the uniqueness of animal and human, particularly that of a horse and a child.

The general meaning of this poem is of a young boy who finds a lot of excitement in riding a horse and pretending to be part of that horse or to be one whole being with the horse.

The experience is definitely jovial and merry for both human and animal.

When the mother asks why May's mouth is green, then we discover May's secret love left her mouth green with a kiss.

Let's Get Technical, Technical, I Wanna Get Technical, Let Me Hear Your Bawdy Talk....

If I may, hesitantly, return to the sex theme.

Words such as "jack-knife," "bare-feet," and "half moons," are common among farming peoples.

The image of the horse and rider can be seen even as the image of a little girl on a stick is pictured.

Often times, poets use more than one element of style to portray their meaning effectively.

Swenson uses a very strong imagery theme in her poem.

Swenson's language in the poem is simple, yet she carries the poem to new heights with its child-like non-complexity.

The narration is told in long sentences that is characteristic of a child's stream of consciousness.

Ordinarily one's feet would not touch the ground while riding a horse and if so he or she would have shoes on them, but in this case there was no horse and her feet were her means of transportation. This allows the reader to deduce from the image of the linoleum that there was no real horse.

Vivid imagery runs rampant in the poem.

Poems are greatly enhanced by the application of various literary techniques.

The first element the reader encounters is language.

The poem represents simple, relaxed speech instead of superfluous poetry.

It can also be concluded that it is fairly modern, as it does not use the Old English style of writing.

The image uses juxtaposition to convey the meaning of the poem. It puts both the horse's rump and the girl's behind next to each other to show the unity between nature and youth.

Regular uses of punctuation such as periods, question marks, and commas help to establish that the speaker's ride is an annual tradition.

The structure is also comparable to that of a 10 year old.

May Swenson does not use language a tremendous amount in "The Centaur" to show meaning, but she does use it.

Poetry is a type of literary genre that allows a writer a variety of ways to express his thoughts. Often times, a poet will choose to do this by picking a childhood experience, recalling the emotions that accompanied it, and use basic literary elements to convey these feelings.

Swenson also used structure to convey meaning. All of the stanzas have three lines to them until the reader sees the final one.

To place the poem, the author puts in language that is related to the 20th Century.

However, the language is short and to the point in the dialogue of the poem between mother and child. This conveys a believable scene as humans do speak in short sentences, generally speaking.

The girl works herself into a frenzy starting in the sixth stanza, her wild energy steadily increasing to a crescendo of pubescent ecstasy. The intensity builds to the 16th stanza, where it abruptly drops off.

How About the Obvious

Swenson's diction gives the reader the feeling of being part of her train of thought.

"My head and my neck were mine, yet they were shaped like a horse," is one example of a young girl's imagination.

The structure of the poem is very unique, in its own way.

The young girl admires horses and wishes to become one herself.

We know that the little girl never really turns into a horse.

It is important to note that she is not experiencing her sexuality with anyone else but herself.

The narrator uses words like "I" and "my" to show that the story is relating to her.

For example, in line 40, "spanked by own behind," you can tell that the girl went through the whole process of even slapping her own behind for the purpose of acting like a horse and to enjoy herself. A lot of people wouldn't do that unless they had a motive.

The poem was written to tell the story of a young lady who enjoyed horseback riding so much that she actually began to feel like a horse.

Most children at one time or another have displayed animal like qualities.

She says that she was pulling grass with a friend when the truth was she was eating it.

Youth is something that all people have in common.

Because the poem is named "The Centaur," the reader can begin to think about what the poem is about.

She even hits her own bottom to gain speed.

The most interesting point that the poem brings across in the beginning is that there is no real horse.

Without language in this poem, you are lost.

The reader is obliged to keep reading to discover the next event.

There's a bit of horseplay in this poem.

This poem contains basic language material, which allows it to be effective.

After all, doesn't every little girl want a pony at some time or other.

Poems are not easily interpreted these days.