

Interpretive Essay

Prewriting

Before you can write an interpretive essay about a poem, you need to analyze the work's main message and the elements that contribute to it. Use the chart below to record your observations and some examples from the poem. After you have filled in the chart, decide what you think the theme might be. Write it on the line.

Sound Devices	Figurative Language	Words or Phrases	Represents

The main message of (name of poem) _____
by (name of author) _____ is _____

Interpretive Essay

Drafting and Elaboration

The paragraph below is from the first draft of a student’s interpretive essay about the poem “The Pasture” by Robert Frost. It does not include enough examples, details, or transitions. Make it more understandable by following the Suggestions for Elaboration. You can use information from the Reader’s Notebook or add your own ideas. Write your paragraph on a separate sheet of paper.

Draft

He starts off by saying that he’s going to clean the pasture spring. I didn’t know how someone might do that but now I do know. They use a rake. The poet says that. He also says that he may also wait there and look at the water. I think he says that to point out that maybe he’s not just going to clean up the spring. He’s going to stand around and look at things.

Suggestions for Elaboration

- Include the author’s name.
- Add more details about the poem’s content.
- Include transitions that help readers understand what part of the poem is being discussed.
- Include a direct quotation.
- Interpret the meaning of some line or phrase.

READER’S NOTEBOOK

I get the feeling that Frost really loves the country. ■ Second line is “I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away.” ■ There are parentheses around the third line where he says he may wait to watch the water get clear. ■ Parentheses suggest that this is unimportant, yet it is mentioned in a very brief poem, so it must be important to the speaker. ■ The last line of each stanza repeats: “I shan’t be gone long.—You come too.” ■ This might mean it takes only a little while to notice nature. ■ I can’t tell who *you* is, but perhaps the poet is speaking directly to readers.

Interpretive Essay

Peer Response Guide

Because you are writing about your interpretation of a poem that you have read, your essay may make perfect sense to you. However, it may not be as clear to readers who are not familiar with the poem. They may not understand your ideas or why you interpret the poem as you do. To make sure that your essay clearly communicates your ideas, ask a peer reviewer to read it and answer the following questions.

1. Do you know what poem I wrote about and what main point I was trying to make about it? How can I make those things clearer?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

2. Which examples provide the strongest support for my main idea, and which seem weak?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

3. Where would some examples, quotations, or transitions be helpful?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

Peer Response Guide continued

4. What ideas do you want to know more about or have explained more clearly?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

5. How could I strengthen the statement that introduces my interpretation of the poem's message?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

6. What changes might make my conclusion stronger?

Response:

Suggestions for Revision:

Interpretive Essay

Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

Revising

TARGET SKILL ► Supporting Your Response with Examples

As you revise your interpretive essay, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I support my point with direct quotations and examples from the text?
- Did I include paraphrases and images that would help readers understand the poem and my ideas about it?
- Did I identify the poem and its author and summarize the poem’s main message in the introduction?
- Have I organized my ideas in some logical fashion and included transitions that help readers follow them?
- Does my conclusion summarize my interpretation of the poem’s meaning?

Editing and Proofreading

TARGET SKILL ► Subject-Verb Agreement

Use the suggestions given below to revise and proofread the following paragraph from the rough draft of one student’s interpretive essay. Then correct errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling using proofreading marks. Finally, copy your corrected draft onto a separate sheet of paper.

- Be sure to correct any errors in subject-verb agreement. Verbs should agree with their subjects in number.
- Punctuate and capitalize quotations correctly.
- Avoid sentence fragments. Be sure all sentences have a subject and a verb.
- Be sure to use commas with appositives and in compound sentences.

Draft

He keep saying that he won’t be gone long. It don’t take a lot of time to clean out a spring and look at the water. He invite someone to come along but you never know who this person is. He says, “you come too.” Perhaps a neighbor. He could also be saying it to me the reader.

Applying

Now edit and proofread your own interpretive essay. Refer to the bulleted list above.

Interpretive Essay

Strong Student Model

Country Life

1. Identifies the title and author; summarizes the poem's message.

Even though I've spent my entire life in a city, "The Pasture" by Robert Frost is a poem that made me want to visit the country. I don't think my feelings are any accident. I think Frost meant to invite readers into his rural world so they could share the pleasures there and understand the poet's love of the place.

3. Includes clear transitions that help the reader follow the line-by-line organization.

At first, I thought that this was a poem about either the poet or chores, since Frost begins by writing "I'm going out to clean the pasture spring." Next, he tells how he plans to do this. He'll "rake the leaves away." In line three, though, he hints that this is not just a chore. Here he mentions that he might "wait to watch the water clear." Waiting and watching water clear is really not a necessary step, so the speaker must be doing it because he wants to. It must be nice.

2. Presents examples from the poem to support interpretations.

- Other Options:*
- Organize by stanzas.
 - Organize by topic or poetic element.
 - Organize by order of importance.

This idea was confirmed when the speaker says, "I shan't be gone long.—You come too." That line, which is repeated at the end of the poem, seems to sum up the poem's theme: it takes only a moment to enjoy simple country pleasures, and the speaker wants others to come along while he enjoys them. I think that the "you" in "You come too," is not only an unseen character, but also readers, you and me.

4. Offers a clear statement of the writer's interpretation of the poem.

5. Paraphrases parts of the poem; quotes other parts to support writer's interpretation.

In the second stanza, Frost mentions another task. He is going to "fetch the little calf." Then he describes the scene in the pasture. Cow and calf are standing together, and the calf "totters when she licks it with her tongue." I could picture the whole event: green pasture, cow licking her calf, little calf tottering on shaky legs, someone watching. Frost then repeats the line, "I shan't be gone long.—You come too."

In fact, I did come with him, because Frost took me there. He gave me a short but very pleasing glimpse of a world that he loved. That glimpse convinced me that it was a world that I and most other readers would enjoy, too.

6. Summarizes the writer's interpretation in conclusion.

Interpretive Essay

Average Student Model

Interpretation of “The Pasture”

1. Gives the author and title right away. Summarizes the main idea.

When I read “The Pasture,” by Robert Frost, I liked the view it gave me of the pasture and what goes on there. Although he uses few words, they are enough to convince me that the country might have some real attractions for people. Frost seems to like the pasture so much that he made me want to see it, too.

3. Includes direct quotations and paraphrases to support interpretation.

I thought that Frost was just telling readers how he does his chores. He explains that he is going to clean the spring, and then suggests that this will be quick. “I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away,” he writes. He then adds a line that tells me that this trip to the pasture is not all work. In parentheses, as if it were an afterthought, he points out that he might also “wait to watch the water clear.” Now this isn’t part of a chore. It must be fun, or why would the speaker do this?

Frost then says that it does not take a long time to enjoy country things, and that other people should come along, too. He refers to some character as “you,” and while readers may not know who that character is, they will probably think that the poet is speaking to them.

5. Once again, transitions and direct quotations would make this clearer.

Later on, Frost announces that he’s going to get a calf. The calf is probably in the pasture, too. It’s standing next to its mother, and it’s very young. She licks it, and it “totters.” The word “totters” has a nice sound, and it helped me picture just how the little calf might look, standing on wobbly legs.

“The Pasture” is a very short poem. It’s just eight lines long. However, in that short time the poet is able to give readers a quick look at two different scenes. The scenes are very different—watching water clear and watching a little calf—but they are both nice. The poet’s promise that he wouldn’t be gone long and his invitation really tell the main point, I think. He is saying that he is doing and seeing these nice things. They do not take long, and you should try them, too.

2. Needs some transitions to help readers understand that this happens at the beginning.

Another Option:
• Summarize the poem’s structure and content early in the interpretation.

4. Slightly confusing. Direct quotation would help clarify the point.

6. Slightly wordy conclusion; could use more precise language in place of vague words, such as nice, which is repeated.

Interpretive Essay

Weak Student Model

A Nice Poem

1. Omits author's name. Does not really interpret poem, so much as summarize it.

"The Pasture" is a very short poem. It is only eight lines long. It is not only about a pasture but also about a calf. I think that the poet is trying to tell readers what happens in the country.

He starts off by saying that he's going to clean the pasture spring. I didn't know how someone might do that but now I do know. They take a rake and take the leaves away. The poet says that in the second line. He also says that he may also wait there and look at the water as it gets clear. I think he says that because maybe he's not just going to clean up the spring. He's also going to stand around and look at things.

3. No examples support this statement. Lack of subject-verb agreement.

He won't be gone long. I don't take a lot of time to clean out a spring and look at the water. He invites someone to come along, but you never know who this person is. I think it's either a neighbor or maybe it's the reader. He says, "You come too."

The poem then goes on to tell about a calf. The speaker says that he is going to fetch it. You don't know if this is the same trip as the one to the pasture or if it is a different trip. I think it's the same trip.

5. Repetition of it. No support for the writer's opinion. Transitions needed throughout to help readers.

The calf is not doing anything. It's just standing in the pasture with its mother. It's very young. Because it's so young, it can hardly stand still when the cow licks it. The speaker says that this trip will not take long. He then invites someone to come along again. He repeats the same line, so he must really mean it.

I liked this poem. I liked the sound of it. It's easy to read and the poet even uses a little bit of rhyme. He rhyme two lines in every verse. I think living in the country must be nice. Cleaning out a spring and watching cows doesn't really seem like work. I think that I would enjoy spending my time doing that.

2. Needs some direct quotations. Should delete second, third, and fourth sentences.

4. Confusing, because reader can't tell if this is in the poem or part of the writer's interpretation.

6. Direct quotation of the line would be helpful.

7. Conclusion is weak. Writer discusses structure and personal response; the writer has good ideas, but includes no strong summary of interpretation. Lack of subject-verb agreement.

Interpretive Essay

Rubric for Evaluation

Ideas and Content	Weak	Average	Strong
1. Identifies the title and author of the poem			
2. Contains a clear statement that introduces the interpretation			
3. Gives an interpretation that goes beyond the literal meaning			
4. Includes examples, quotations, and paraphrases that support the interpretation			
Structure and Form			
5. Introduction identifies the poem and provides a clear statement of the poem's message			
6. Uses transitional words and phrases to show organization			
7. Conclusion summarizes the writer's interpretation			
Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics			
8. Uses correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation			
9. Uses correct grammar			

Writing Progress to Date (Writing Portfolio)

The strongest aspect of this writing is _____

The final version shows improvement over the rough draft in this way: _____

A specific improvement over past assignments in your portfolio is _____

A skill to work on in future assignments is _____

Additional comments: _____
