# Poetry Prompts, 1971 – 2010

1971 "Elegy for Jane" (Theodore Roethke) Write an essay in which you describe the speaker's attitude toward his former student.

1972 "The Unknown Citizen" (W. H. Auden) In a brief essay, identify at least two of the implications implicit in the society reflected in the poem. Support your statements by specific references to the poem.

1973 No poem

1974 "I wonder whether one expects. . . " (No poet listed) Write a unified essay in which you relate the imagery of the last stanza to the speaker's view of himself earlier in the poem and to his view of how others see poets.

1975 No poem

1976 "Poetry of Departures" (Philip Larkin) Write an essay in which you discuss how the poet's diction (choice of words) reveals his attitude toward the two ways of living mentioned in the poem.

1977 "Piano" (two poems by D. H. Lawrence) Read both poems carefully and then write an essay in which you explain what characteristics of the second poem make it better than the first. Refer specifically to details of both poems.

1978 "Law Like Love" (W. H. Auden) Read the poem and then write an essay discussing the differences between the conceptions of "law" in lines 1-34 and those in lines 35-60.

1979 "Spring and All" (William Carlos Williams) and "For Jane Meyers" (Louise Gluck) Read the two poems carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you show how the attitudes towards the coming of spring implied in these two poems differ from each other. Support your statements with specific references to the texts.

1980 "One Art" (Elizabeth Bishop) Write an essay in which you describe how the speaker's attitude toward loss in lines 16-19 is related to her attitude toward loss in lines 1-15. Using specific references to the text, show how verse form and language contribute to the reader's understanding of these attitudes.

1981 "Storm Warnings" (Adrienne Rich) Write an essay in which you explain how the organization of the poem and the use of concrete details reveal both its literal and its metaphorical meanings. In your discussion, show how both of these meanings relate to the title.

1982 "The Groundhog" (Richard Eberhart) Write an essay in which you analyze how the language of the poem reflects the changing perceptions and emotions of the speaker as he considers the metamorphosis of the dead groundhog. Develop your essay with specific references to the text of the poem.

1983 "Clocks and Lovers" (W. H. Auden) Write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the attitude of the clocks with that of the lover. Through careful analysis of the language and imagery, show how this contrast is important to the meaning of the poem.

1984 No poem

1985 "There Was a Boy" (William Wordsworth) and "The Most of It" (Robert Frost) These two poems present encounters with nature, but the two poets handle those encounters very differently. In a well-organized essay, distinguish between the attitudes (toward nature, toward the solitary individual, etc.) expressed in the poems and discuss the techniques that the poets use to present these attitudes. Be sure to support your statements with specific references.

1. "Ogun" (E. K. Braithwaite) Read the poem. You will note that it has two major sections that are joined by another section, lines 21-26. Write an essay in which you discuss how the diction, imagery, and movement of the verse in the poem reflect differences in tone and content between the two larger sections.

1987 "Sow" (Sylvia Plath) Read the poem. Then write an essay in which you analyze the presentation of the sow. Consider particularly how the language of the poem reflects both the neighbor's and the narrator's perceptions of the sow and how the language determines the reader's perceptions. Be certain to discuss how the portrayal of the sow is enhanced by such features as diction, devices of sound, images, and allusions.

1988 "Bright Star (John Keats) and "Choose Something Like a Star" (Robert Frost) Read the following two poems very carefully, noting that the second includes an allusion to the first. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss their similarities and differences. In your essay, be sure to consider both theme and style.

1989 "The Great Scarf of Birds" (John Updike) Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the poem's organization, diction, and figurative language prepare the reader for the speaker's concluding response.

1990 Soliloquy ("Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown") from *Henry IV, Part II* (Shakespeare) In the soliloquy, King Henry laments his inability to sleep. In a well-organized essay, briefly summarize the King's thoughts and analyze how the diction, imagery, and syntax help to convey his state of mind.

1991 "The Last Night that She Lived" (Emily Dickinson) Write an essay in which you describe the speaker's attitude toward the woman's death. Using specific references from the text, show how the use of language reveals the speaker's attitudes.

1992 from *The Prelude* (William Wordsworth) "One summer evening (led by her) I found. . . were a trouble to my dreams." In the passage below, which comes from William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem  *The Prelude*, the speaker encounters unfamiliar aspects of the natural world. Write an essay in which you trace the speaker's changing responses to his experience and explain how they are conveyed by the poem's diction, imagery, and tone.

1993 "The Centaur" (May Swenson) 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.

1994 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" by E. A. Poe and "Helen" by H.D.)

1995 Read the following poem carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the speaker uses the varied imagery of the poem to reveal his attitude toward the nature of love.

("The Broken Heart" by John Donne)

1996 Read carefully the following poem by the colonial American poet, Anne Bradstreet. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how the poem's controlling metaphor expresses the complex attitude of the speaker.

("The Author to Her Book" by Anne Bradstreet)

1997 Read the following poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how formal elements such as structure, syntax, diction, and imagery reveal the speaker's response to the death of a toad.

("The Death of a Toad" by Richard Wilbur)

1. The following poem was written by a contemporary Irish woman, Eavan Boland. Read the poem carefully and then write an essay in which you analyze how the poem reveals the speaker's complex conception of a "woman's world."

(“It’s a Woman’s World” by Eavan Boland)

1. Read the following poem carefully, paying particular attention to the physical intensity of the language. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how the poet conveys not just a literal description of picking blackberries but a deeper understanding of the whole experience. You may wish to include analysis of such elements as diction, imagery, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, and form. (“Blackberry-Picking” by Seamus Heaney)
2. The story of Odysseus’ encounter with the Sirens and the enchanting but deadly song appears in Greek epic poetry in Homer’s *Odyssey*. An English translation of the episode is reprinted in the left column below. Margaret Atwood’s poem in the right column is a modern commentary on the classical story. Read both texts carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare the portrayals of the Sirens. You analysis should include discussion of tone, point of view, and whatever poetic devices (diction, imagery, etc.) seem most important.
3. In each of the following poems, the speaker responds to the conditions of a particular place and time—England in 1802 in the first poem, the United States about 100 years later in the second. Read each poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems and analyze the relationship between them. (“London,” 1802 by William Wordsworth and “Douglass” by Paul Laurence Dunbar)
4. Read the following poem carefully. Then, taking into consideration the title of the poem, analyze how the poetic devices convey the speaker’s attitude toward the sinking of the ship. (“The Convergence of the Twain” by Thomas Hardy)

2002 (B) The following poem is a villanelle, a form having strict rules of rhyme, meter, and repetition. Read the poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the formal elements of the poem contribute to its meaning. (“If I Could Tell You” by W. H. Auden)

1. The following poems are both concerned with Eros, the god of love in Greek mythology. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two concepts of Eros and analyze the techniques used to create them. (“EPΩΣ” by Robert Bridges and “Eros” by Anne Stevenson)

2003 (B) The following poem is taken from *Modern Love,* apoetic sequence by the English writer

George Meredith. Read the poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you

analyze how the poet conveys a view of “modern love.” (“Modern Love” by George Meredith)

1. The poems below are concerned with darkness and night. Read each poem carefully. Then,

in a well-written essay, compare and contrast the poems, analyzing the significance of dark

or night in each. In your essay, consider elements such as point of view, imagery, and

structure. (“We grow accustomed to the Dark” by Emily Dickinson and “Acquainted with the

night” by Robert Frost)

2004 (B) Read the following poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the techniques the

poet uses to develop the relationship between the speaker and the swamp. (“Crossing the

Swamp,” by Mary Oliver)

1. The poems below, published in 1789 and 1794, were written by William Blake in response to

the condition of chimney sweeps. Usually small children, sweeps were forced inside

chimneys to clean their interiors. Read the two poems carefully. Then, in a well-written

essay, compare and contrast the two poems, taking into consideration the poetic techniques

Blake uses in each.

2005 (B) Carefully read the two poems below. Then in a well-organized essay copare the speakers’

reflections on their early morning surroundings and analyze the techniques the poes use to

communicate the speakers’ different states of mind. (“Five A.M.” by William Stafford and

“Five Flights Up” by Elizabeth Bishop)

1. Read the following poem carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the poet uses language to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. (“Evening Hawk” by Robert Penn Warren)

2006 (B) Read the following poem carefully. Then write an essay discussing how the poet uses literary techniques to reveal the speaker’s attitudes toward nature and the artist’s task. (“To Paint a Water Lily” by Ted Hughes)

1. In the following two poems, adults provide explanations for children. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing how each poet uses literary devices to make his point. (“A Barred Owl” by Richard Wilbur and “The History Teacher” by Billy Collins)

2007 (B) Read the following poem carefully. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze

the techniques the poet uses to convey his attitude toward the places he describes. (“Here”

by Philip Larkin)

1. In the two poems below, Keats and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the poems

carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his particular situation. (“When I Have Fears,” by John Keats and “Mezzo Cammin” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

2008 (B) The following two poems present animal-eye views of the world. Read each poem carefully.

Then write an essay in which you analyze the techniques used in the poems to characterize

the speakers and convey differeing views of the world. (“Hawk Roosting” by Ted Hughes and

“Golden Retrievals” by Mark Doty)

1. The following speech from Shakespeare’s play *Henry VIII*, Cardinal Wolsey considers his sudden downfall from his position as advisor to the king. Spokesmen for the king have just left Wolsey alone on stage. Read the speech carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Shakespeare uses elements such as allusion, figurative language, and tone to convey Wolsey’s complex response to his dismissal from court.

2009 (B) The following poem, written by Edward Field, makes use of the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus.

Read the poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Field employs literary devices

in adapting the Icarus myth to a contemporary setting. (“Icarus”)

1. Read carefully the following poem by Marilyn Nelson Waniek. Then write an essay analyzing how

Waniek employs literary techniques to develop the complex meanings that the speaker attributes to The Century Quilt. You may wish to consider such elements as structure, imagery, and tone. (“The

Century Quilt”)

2010 (B) Each of the two poems below is concerned with a young man at the age of twenty-one, traditionally the

age of adulthood. Read the two poems carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you

compare and contrast the poems, analyzing the poetic techniques, such as point of view and tone, that

each writer uses to make his point about coming of age. (“To Sir John Lade, on His Coming of Age” by

Samuel Johnson and “When I was One-and-Twenty” by A. E. Housman)

2011 The following poem is by the contemporary poet Li-Young Lee. Read the poem carefully. Then write a

well-organized essay in which you analyze how the poet conveys the complex relationship of the father

and the son through the use of literary devices such as point of view and structure. (“A Story” by Li-

Young Lee)

2011 (B) Read carefully the following poem by Robert Pack, paying close attention to the relationship between

form and meaning. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the literary techniques used in this

poem contribute to its meaning. (“An Echo Sonnet” by Robert Pack)