

AP English Literature and Composition
Question 1: Poetry Analysis (2019)
Sample Student Responses

The student responses in this packet were selected from the 2019 Reading and have been rescored using the new rubrics for 2020. Commentaries for each sample are provided in a separate document.

Student responses have been transcribed verbatim; any errors in spelling or grammar appear as they do in the original handwritten response.

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Sample HH

[1] One's predestination for introversion or extroversion – whether due to genetics, trauma, or environment – may seem to be an asset to most, or even passive at the least. In reality, this can be crippling. The Landlady's message as portrayed by P.K. Page, directly addressed the unsettling 'creepiness' of an individual who is dependent on the many worlds that exist around her in the tenants and their personal lives. The landlady's complexity makes the audience feel something slightly less intense than condemnation, but also less sympathetic than pity, as reinforced by Page's implementation of active verbs, abrupt punctuation and selective personification.

[2] The landlady's insatiable dependence on others is more fundamental to her existence than can be understood by anyone with a joyful life of their own. Page equips stanza four with active physical verbs, such as "unlocks" (line 14) and "searches" (line 15), portraying the physical aspect of her reliance on others' lives. She actively gathers physical evidence of their goings-on. Page follows this with active emotional verbs characterizing stanza five. As the landlady "wonders" (line 17) and "dreams" (line 18) of what happens in the unavailable portions of the boarders' lives, her mindscape is established as being shaped by what "they" (lines 17 and 18), the boarders, do. Page then takes this concept to a new depth with the reappearance of the subject-less active verb in line 30 to show that the landlady "prays" based on her hopes with regard to the boarders. This audience in response feels disgusted by the physical violations of privacy and irked by the mental dedication the landlady spends on virtual strangers, but her spiritual reliance on them is apparently not her choice. This can rather be seen as a condition that the landlady is forced to live with, establishing complex conflict in the audience between disapproval and empathy.

[3] The landlady's approach to self-fulfillment is unusually formulaic, like Page's syntax. Abrupt punctuation separates short and direct sentences, such as in stanza two. The first line is 7 words followed by a colon, then the next line is 6 words followed by a semicolon. The poem continues with many more short and direct compositions that reflect a formulaic way of thinking – like the landlady's – rather than the more open-ended nature of long sentences and ideas with many clauses and little punctuation.

[4] Page's personification adds human traits to inanimate objects the same way that the landlady creates an image of people she does not personally know. Line 3 allows the silence to swallow, giving humanistic traits to something that is empty and unfulfilled – a lack of sound. This parallels the landlady's application of 'exciting' sounds to the unexciting silences and reservations of strangers. She, in effect, applies traits and stories to the "impersonal" (line 2) boarders. These parallels between the landlady and Page's use of personification help define the complex nature of what the landlady is trying to do for self-fulfillment.

[5] The futility of the landlady's condition impedes her life in a way that also violates others', leading to a complicated response from the audience. By examining Page's charged active verbs, abrupt punctuation and line structure, and personification, the landlady's actions and motives become clearer, establishing an emptiness inside herself without those around her. Whether or not this is the cause of the landlady's ill wishes in the final line of the poem, the audience is left with a mix of complex emotions between anger and empathy.

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Sample OO

[1] In every person's life there consists a rarely thought of group of acquaintances who despite interacting little in person with an individual, know intimate details of their life. The garbageman, the postal service worker, the landlady – These people enjoy a unique perspective of the populations they serve; they process the things we deem useless and discard, handle the personal messages and financial information we send and receive, they own the homes we foolishly call our own. In P.K. Page's 1943 poem, "The Landlady" he portrays one such woman with intimate knowledge of the lives of others, despite her boarders' attempts to maintain their privacy. Page portrays the landlady as a curious and inquisitive presence who may just have dark motives, using the elements of imagery and tone to convey her complexity.

[2] Page's use of imagery highlights specific body parts with which the landlady conducts her observations, giving her a nearly un-human like presence by isolating each act of invasion. Page compares the landlady's eye to a camera, giving the impression that she attempts to remember and immortalize the things she sees. He describes her as having "tickling ears," implying that she is always listening, ready to overhear whatever private information she can glean. He describes her flesh itself as "curious," as if she not only perceives information, but somehow absorbs it through her skin as well. Page's use of imagery which isolates the Landlady's senses make her feel like she is a machine, designed and engineered for ultimate invasion of privacy and gives her an almost ominous and omnipresent feeling. Additionally, Page describes the actions of the boarders as very cautious and private. Particularly, the image of boarders who "hold the walls about them as they weep or laugh" allows the reader to visualize the type of paranoia the landlady's presence creates.

[3] When portraying the landlady Page employs a very ominous tone, helping to emphasize the potentially dangerous nature of a woman who knows so much. When Page describes boarders' belongings as being "theirs and hers" he gives her a very possessive characteristic, further emphasized by her desire to, "like a lover...know all, all, all." Her curiosity is insatiable to the point that the reader worries what extremes she may go to to know every detail of her boarders' lives. The ominous tone is best exemplified by the speaker's description of her desire to "catch [the boarders] unprepared at last and palm the dreadful riddle of their skulls – hoping the worst." The word "catch" has a very ominous and malicious connotation, as though the landlady is a predator and the darkest secrets of her boarders' her prey.

[4] Page's portrayal of the landlady as an inquisitive and sinister character help to convey the idea that all people, even the seemingly insignificant ones in our lives hold the potential for darkness and danger, if only given the knowledge to exploit that inner darkness.

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Sample T

[1] In their poem, “The Landlady,” P.K. Page illustrates the life of a landlady and how her actions result in her playing multiple roles in the lives of her boarders. Through their use of irony and metaphors, the poet demonstrates that impersonal connections spark curiosity in the other party, revealing the immoral nature of humanity to always lean towards discovering the faults of others.

[2] The irony of the difference between how the landlady describes her relationship with the boarders and the reality of intrusiveness by the landlady reveal her curiosity to always discover more about the boarders. In the first stanza, the landlady states that “the boarders come and go / impersonal as trains.” Trains are a method of transportation, revealing through the simile that the landlady is only providing a temporary stop for her boarders to help them get from one place to another, much like transportation. The temporary quality of the boarder’s time with the landlady supports the idea that their relationship is impersonal. There is no time to form a lasting bond. However, despite establishing this detachment from her boarders the landlady also “searches their rooms for clues when they are out / pricks when they come home late.” Searching her boarders rooms is an invasion of privacy, which is completely unusual and out of place in a relationship that is supposedly impersonal. The irony of this difference reveals that the landlady cannot prevent herself from finding out about the boarders. She cannot suppress her curiosity within an impersonal relationship, which not only paints her character as intrusive, but also reveals that she cannot only be a temporary stop for the boarders. The landlady desires to play another role in her boarder’s lives, which she does by inserting herself in their lives and discovering more about them.

[3] Metaphors involving the landlady’s actions reveal her motivations for her curiosity to find faults in others. The landlady is described to have a “camera eye”. This metaphor portray that they landlady is remembering her boards with a sense of permanance, much like how a photograph makes an event seem permanent. Photographs are also used in investigations; they hold proof of evidence so that it cannot be destroyed. In seeing everything through her camera eye, the landlady is trying to capture every moment in the lives of the boarders, holding onto to evidence of their faults. This is further supported when the landlady “prays she may catch them unprepared at last and palm the dreadful riddle of their skulls – hoping the worst.” The metaphor between the boarder’s thoughts and a riddle again reveal the investigative nature of the landlady, seeing the boarder’s as puzzles she cannot understand. However, the fact she is still hoping the worst reveal that her investigation is not only done out of simple curiosity. Her motivation to find faults in others reveal the immorality of human nature, perhaps caused by pride to be superior to the people around.

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Sample V

[1] In the poem “The Landlady,” a speaker describes how a landlady views her tenants, yet does so in a way that portrays the landlord to be overbearing and much too curious. She seems to want to know the boarders that set up camp in her home yet they wish to keep to themselves. The landlady’s curiosity for those who stay with her and her desire to sift through their things in order to get to know them is express using literary elements such as imagery, metaphors, and similes, and towards the end, it’s clear that she gets to know them more intimately that the boarders probably hoped or expected.

[2] In the first half of the poem before the shift occurs between line 20 and 21, the speaker reveals the landlady’s yearn to know the people the houses. The speaker uses a simile in stanza one to describe closed doors to be “...like shutters on her camera eyes.” Behind the doors is what she wishes to capture, she wishes to see what goes on. But the boarder’s wish for privacy prevents this wish of hers. The people who stay wish to keep their lives personal which is why, “their lives become exact,” and “phone calls are cryptic.” But she just seems a bit curious at first, which is why, “she peers stippled with curious flesh.” The next couple of lines are what she wishes she could do. She wishes she could enter their room and examine their things out of the idea in which she believes she does not know them like she wishes she could. In lines 17 to 20, the poem reads, “Wonders when they are quiet, jumps when they move, dreams they dope or drink, trembles to know the traffic of their brains...”. The use of asyndeton in these lines shows how much the landlady dwells on the boarders and how greatly it seems to affect her that she doesn’t know them when in reality she knows them better than most people do.

[3] At line 21, there is a shift, and at this point in the poem, it is revealed that this landlady is oblivious to how well she actually knows her tenants. The first stanza explains how everything they use and own are essentially hers but in a metaphorical sense. She owns the place in which they stay in, so it’s almost as if she is part owner of their property since she houses them. It states that she “knows when they wash, how frequently their clothes go to the cleaners, what they like to eat...but even so is not content.” The landlady in actuality know more about these people than their closest friends do because she has familiarized herself with their routine. Unfortunately, this is not enough to satisfy her. All she wishes is to... “catch them unprepared” so she can get to know the part of them that is not formulated or controlled. Though she knows more about them than most, it is not enough for her.

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Sample EE

[1] There is always a set of eyes watching, most just simply fail to notice, oblivious to the shadows around them. Such feels like the case in P.K. Page’s poem, “The Landlady.” In it, Page crafts an ominously intimate portrayal of the landlady through the use of techniques like imagery, selection of detail, and tone.

[2] As soon as the poem begins, the speaker begins to use imagery. Phrases like “sepia air” provoke a sense of watching, almost as if the speaker is observing through some sort of film or television. They then continue to elaborate upon this feeling of a lack of privacy when the poem reads, “...Click doors like shutters on her camera eye.” Such a phrase only adds to the notion of the landlady becoming a probing eye. And it is this notion that is also expanded as the poem progresses.

[3] Near the center of the poem, the speaker provides insight as to what the Landlady does while the boarders are not present. Page writes, “Unlocks their keyholes with the wire of sight, searches their rooms for clues when they are out...” But focusing on these details, these actions of the Landlady, the speaker paints her as someone who is nosey, someone who does not mind infiltrating the privacy of others in order to satisfy her own curiosity. Yet, the stanza that follows rebels against this portrayal almost as it reads, “Wonders when they are quiet, jumps when they move...jaywalks their street in clumsy shoes.” At this instance, the speaker makes the Landlady out to be, what seems like, considerate. She wonders about them, moves with them, feels with them, and it even appears she attempts to think like them. In this sense, she does not seem so scary, so probing, but more like a mom of sorts.

[4] Throughout the poem, the tone does fluctuate. Lines like, “Because of her their lives are exact...” are somewhat appreciative and allow readers to discover the Landlady as a caring guardian. However, on the contrary, lines like, “Their private mail, their photographs are theirs and hers,” evoke a frightening tone by making the reader feel as if nothing is sacred, nothing is private, and as if the Landlady is this looming Big Brother type of presence. But then, in the end, the reader finds the tone intimate again with the line, And like a lover must know all, all, all.” By choosing the word “lover” the speaker nearly justifies the Landlady and brings her caringness into the spotlight.

[5] All in all, Page uses a wide variety of techniques in order to craft their portrayal of the Landlady; imagery, selection of detail, and tone just being a few. Yet regardless, it does stand true that the speaker depicts the landlady as someone who shares a sort of ominous intimacy with those who inhabit her rooms, evoking not only fright but also trust.

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Sample E

[1] In P.K. Page's poem "The Land lady," the speaker portrays the landlady as a predator, as if she was stalking her prey. This portrayal is accomplished through the poet's use of diction, and tone.

[2] Throughout the entirety of the poem, diction is used with unsettling negative connotation whenever describing the landlady, or when describing boarders' reactions to the landlady. This is exemplified in many instances, such as when the landlady "peers stippled with curious flesh" (lines 11-12). The word flesh has a creepy connotation, dehumanizing the boarders and painting an image of soulless, lifeless bodies instead. The landlady "trembles" to know her boarders' thoughts, and "jumps" when boarders' move (line 17-18); this diction also suspends for they are descriptive verbs of high energy motions. The negative connotation throughout this poem's diction paints the landlady in an ill, negative light and adds layers of suspense to the reader.

[3] The poet devises a creepy, unsettling, suspenseful tone throughout the poem, in order to convey how the boarders feel about the landlady. The poet describes the measures boarders take to avoid succumbing to the landlady in great detail, painting the landlady as a threat, and the boarders, in turn, as victims. The creepy tone adds suspense to the landlady and boarder's relationship, coming across to the reader as tense and dangerous.

[4] The poet uses many devices in order to convey that landlady as a threat and portray her in an "evil" light; these devices include a creepy tone, and negative diction.

Sample SS

[1] "The Landlady" poem analyzes the speaker's complex portrayal by using elements as imagery, diction, and a style of quatrain.

[2] The author organizes the poem in a quatrain form and having a lot of stops at the end of the lines causing thoughts and curiosity. In the first stanza the author included two similes in which compares people with trains and click doors to cameras, these comparisons emphasize the setting in which the poem is trying to imply we can suggest that the setting is a room where they're giving a speech. The people come and go as a train meaning their going in and out from the room.

[3] The word choice of diction creates an image in the reader's mind for example "They hold the walls about them as they weep or laugh" these explain the faces of the public. Also "wonders when they are quiete ...trembles to know the traffic of their brains" these give us an image in how the people is acting physical and mental.

[4] The landlady's use of elements was to introduce the meaning of the poem and make the reader understand the purpose. In the poem is about a woman giving a speech in which many individuals depend for their lives to be exact.