

Explication: a Visual Version

Introduction	State the author's name and the title of the poem. Tell the reader what the poem is about. Depending on what is appropriate to the poem, give the "plot" of the poem, characterize the speaker, introduce the characters or the setting, or relate the scene. In addition, tell your interpretation of the poem (as it differs from what the poem is about).
figurative language elements	Choose elements of figurative language that contribute in a significant way to the meaning of the poem and explain to your reader how the example or examples of this element build and justify your interpretation of the poem. Remember that elements of figurative language include the connotation of words, the imagery, the chronological structure or the turn in the final lines of the poem, the metaphors, similes, the personification, use of symbols, or use of juxtaposition and paradox).
figurative lanugage elements	Choose some other elements, do it again.
brief conclusion	Close briefly by restating the interpretation, pointing out the significance of this interpretation or otherwise commenting upon the craft of the poem.

A NOTE ON PHRASES TO AVOID:

When explicating, some students find that they feel very tentative or hesitant about their interpretations; as a result, they include phrases that seem to apologize for the interpretation. For example, some students have the urge to write the phrases "This is just my interpretation" or "As I read it" or "the meaning is left up to the reader" into the text of their explications. For the purposes of this class, avoid these phrases. Present your interpretation in a forthright manner that does not apologize for your reading of the poem. Readers know that these are your interpretations (that this is the meaning of the poem according to you) because they are reading a piece of writing with your name on it that belongs to you. Unless you tell your readers otherwise, they will assume that all the thoughts are yours. In addition, your reader wants to feel confident that your interpretation is a valid one (backed up by reasoning and careful exploration of the poem's language) and in putting forth your opinion as to the interpretation, you are arguing that this is a reasonable interpretation for most readers, if not the best interpretation. Obviously, when writing an in-class exam, you will not feel that you have had enough time to read other works by the poet, to

explore his or her life, or to read critical works about the poem. Your interpretation will be for the moment of the in-class essay and given the information you had at hand; it is, therefore, provisional. Yet you should still cultivate this tone of confidence as an element of an effective writing style.

BE SURE TO FULLY INTEGRATE LINES OF POETRY

Integrating poetry can be tricky. Often the language in poems does not follow the normal rules we associate with prose and is, therefore, more complicated to insert into your essay's sentences. When integrating directly into the grammar of your own sentence, consider the following example:

Between the second and third stanzas of "Plea for Forgiveness," Jones interrupts the "manerless speaking" attributed to William Carlos Williams and used by Jones in his poem by describing how Williams "began to construct for his wife the chronicle/ Of his peccadillos" (35). The terms "construct," "chronicle," and "peccadillos" disrupt the plain tone of the poem and mock William's decision by referring to it in inflated, mock heroic terms.

The second sentence above demonstrates how to integrate individual terms and how to introduce them to the reader. If using a signal phrase consider one of the following examples as a model

Jones allows these mocking lines to juxtapose his earlier description of Williams. When introducing Williams, Jones writes, "who had been famous for kindness/ And for bringing our poetry a mannerless speaking" (35). In juxtaposing these lines, Jones suggests that Williams actions are not only cruel but also arrogant and have a falseness (are mannered).

or

These mocking lines follow shortly after the line that reads: "who [Williams] had been famous for kindness/ And for bringing to our poetry a mannerless speaking" (35). In juxtaposing these lines, Jones suggests that Williams actions are not only cruel but also arrogant and have a falseness (are mannered).