

2015 Poem: "XIV" (Derek Walcott)

**Prompt:** In the following poem by Caribbean writer Derek Walcott, the speaker recalls a childhood experience of visiting an elderly woman storyteller. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-developed essay, discuss the speaker's recollection and analyze how Walcott uses poetic devices to convey the significance of the experience.

#### XIV

With the frenzy of an old snake shedding its skin,  
the speckled road, scored with ruts, smelling of mold,  
twisted on itself and reentered the forest  
where the dasheen<sup>1</sup> leaves thicken and folk stories begin.  
5 Sunset would threaten us as we climbed closer  
to her house up the asphalt hill road, whose yam vines  
wrangled over gutters with the dark reek of moss,  
the shutters closing like the eyelids of that mimosa<sup>2</sup>  
called Ti-Marie; then—lucent as paper lanterns,  
10 lamplight glowed through the ribs, house after house—  
there was her own lamp at the black twist of the path.  
There's childhood, and there's childhood's aftermath.  
She began to remember at the minute of the fireflies,  
to the sound of pipe water banging in kerosene tins,  
15 stories she told to my brother and myself.  
Her leaves were the libraries of the Caribbean.  
The luck that was ours, those fragrant origins!  
Her head was magnificent, Sidone. In the gully of her voice  
shadows stood up and walked, her voice travels my shelves.  
She was the lamplight in the stare of two mesmerized boys  
still joined in one shadow, indivisible twins.

<sup>1</sup> dasheen: tropical plant with large leaves

<sup>2</sup> mimosa: tropical plant whose leaves close or droop when touched or shaken

2013 Poem: "The Black Walnut Tree" by Mary Oliver

**Prompt:** Carefully read the following poem by Mary Oliver. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Oliver conveys the relationship between the tree and family through the use of figurative language and other poetic techniques.

### The Black Walnut Tree by Mary Oliver

My mother and I debate:  
we could sell  
the black walnut tree  
to the lumberman,  
5 and pay off the mortgage.  
Likely some storm anyway  
will churn down its dark boughs,  
smashing the house. We talk  
slowly, two women trying  
10 in a difficult time to be wise.  
Roots in the cellar drains,  
I say, and she replies  
that the leaves are getting heavier  
every year, and the fruit  
15 harder to gather away.  
But something brighter than money  
moves in our blood -- an edge  
sharp and quick as a trowel  
that wants us to dig and sow.  
20 So we talk, but we don't do  
anything. That night I dream  
of my fathers out of Bohemia  
filling the blue fields  
of fresh and generous Ohio  
25 with leaves and vines and orchards.  
What my mother and I both know  
is that we'd crawl with shame  
in the emptiness we'd made  
in our own and our fathers' backyard.  
30 So the black walnut tree  
swings through another year  
of sun and leaping winds,  
of leaves and bounding fruit,  
and, month after month, the whip-  
35 crack of the mortgage.

2011 Poem: "An Echo Sonnet" (Robert Pack)

**Prompt:** 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  
To an Empty Page

	Voice:	Echo:
	How from emptiness can I make a start?	Start
	And starting, must I master joy or grief?	Grief
	But is there consolation in the heart?	Art
	Oh cold reprieve, where's natural relief?	Leaf
5	Leaf blooms, burns red before delighted eyes.	Dies
	Here beauty makes of dying, ecstasy.	See
	Yet what's the end of our life's long disease?	Ease
	If death is not, who is my enemy?	Me
	Then are you glad that I must end in sleep?	Leap
10	I'd leap into the dark if dark were true.	True
	And in that night would you rejoice or weep?	Weep
	What contradiction makes you take this view?	You
	I feel your calling leads me where I go.	Go
	But whether happiness is there, you know.	No

2005B Poem: "Five A.M." (William Stafford) / "Five Flights Up" (Elizabeth Bishop)  
**Prompt:** Carefully read the two poems below. Then in a well-organized essay compare the speakers' reflections on their early morning surroundings and analyze the techniques the poets use to communicate the speakers' different states of mind.

### **Five A. M. by William Stafford**

Still dark, the early morning breathes  
A soft sound above the fire. Hooded  
Lights on porches lead past lawns,  
A hedge; I pass the house of the couple  
Who have the baby, the yard with the little  
Dog; my feet pad and grit on the pavement, flicker  
Past streetlights; my arms alternate  
Easily to my pace. Where are my troubles?

There are people in every country who never  
Turn into killers, saints have built  
Sanctuaries on islands and in valleys,  
Conquerors have quit and gone home, for thousands  
Of years farmers have worked their fields.  
My feet begin the uphill curve  
Where a thicket spills with birds every spring.  
The air doesn't stir. Rain touches my face.

### **Five Flights Up by Elizabeth Bishop**

Still dark.  
The unknown bird sits on his usual branch.  
The little dog next door barks in his sleep  
inquiringly, just once.  
Perhaps in his sleep, too, the bird inquires  
once or twice, quavering.  
Questions---if that is what they are---  
answered directly, simply,  
by day itself.

Enormous morning, ponderous, meticulous;  
gray light streaking each bare branch,  
each single twig, along one side,  
making another tree, of glassy veins...  
The bird still sits there. Now he seems to yawn.

The little black dog runs in his yard.  
His owner's voice arises, stern,  
"You ought to be ashamed!"  
What has he done?  
He bounces cheerfully up and down;  
he rushes in circles in the fallen leaves.

Obviously, he has no sense of shame.  
He and the bird know everything is answered,  
all taken care of,  
no need to ask again.  
---Yesterday brought to today so lightly!  
(A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)

2003B Poem: from *Modern Love* (George Meredith - 1862)

**Prompt:** The following poem is taken from *Modern Love*, a poetic 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 I: By This He Knew She Wept by George Meredith**

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:  
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,  
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed  
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,  
5 And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,  
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay  
Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away  
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes  
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears  
10 Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat  
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet  
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,  
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.  
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen  
15 Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;  
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

2003 Poem: "ΕΡΩΣ" (Robert Bridges) / "Eros" (Anne Stevenson)

**Prompt:** The following poems are both concerned with Eros, the god of love in Greek mythology. Read the poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two concepts of Eros and analyze the techniques used to create them.

### ‘ΕΡΩΣ’<sup>1</sup> by Robert Bridges

Why hast thou nothing in thy face?  
Thou idol of the human race,  
Thou tyrant of the human heart,  
The flower of lovely youth that art;  
Yea, and that standest in thy youth  
An image of eternal Truth,  
With thy exuberant flesh so fair,  
That only Pheidias<sup>2</sup> might compare,  
Ere from his chaste marmoreal<sup>3</sup> form  
Time had decayed the colours warm;  
Like to his gods in thy proud dress,  
Thy starry sheen of nakedness.

Surely thy body is thy mind,  
For in thy face is nought to find,  
Only thy soft unchristen’d smile,  
That shadows neither love nor guile,  
But shame;less will and power  
immense,  
In secret sensuous innocence.

O king of joy, what is thy thought?  
I dream thou knowest it is nought.  
And wouldst in darkness come, but thou  
Makest the light where’er thou go.  
Ah yet no victim of thy grace,  
None who e’er long’d for thy embrace,  
Hath cared to look upon thy face.

<sup>1</sup> Eros in Greek

<sup>2</sup> Greek sculptor of the fifth century B.C.

<sup>3</sup> marble

### Eros by Anne Stevenson

I call for love  
But help me, who arrives?  
This thud with broken nose  
And squinty eyes.  
‘Eros, my bully boy,  
Can this be you,  
With boxer lips  
And patchy wings askew?’

‘Madam,’ cries Eros,  
‘Know the brute you see  
Is what long overuse  
Has made of me.  
My face that so offends you  
Is the sum  
Of blows your lust delivered  
One by one.

We slaves who are immortal  
Gloss your fate  
And are the archetypes  
That you create.  
Better my battered visage,  
Bruised but hot,  
Than love dissolved in loss  
Or left to rot.’

2001 Poems: "London, 1802" (William Wordsworth) / "Douglass" (Paul Laurence Dunbar)

**Prompt:** 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**

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
5 Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:  
10 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet the heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

### **Douglass by Paul Laurence Dunbar**

Ah, Douglass, we have fall'n on evil days,  
Such days as thou, not even thou didst know,  
When thee, the eyes of that harsh long ago  
Saw, salient, at the cross of devious ways,  
5 And all the country heard thee with amaze.  
Not ended then, the passionate ebb and flow,  
The awful tide that battled to and fro;  
We ride amid a tempest of dispraise.

Now, when the waves of swift dissension swarm,  
10 And Honor, the strong pilot, lieth stark,  
Oh, for thy voice high-sounding o'er the storm,  
For thy strong arm to guide the shivering bark,  
The blast-defying power of thy form,  
To give us comfort through the lonely dark.

1999 Poem: "Blackberry-Picking" (Seamus Heaney)

**Prompt:** 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**

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
We trekked and picked until the cans were full  
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.  
We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.



1996 Poem: "The Author to Her Book" (Anne Bradstreet)

**Prompt:** 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**

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,  
Till snatcht from thence by friends, less wise than true  
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view;  
Made thee in rags, halting to th' press to trudge,  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judge)  
At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;  
Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:  
I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw,  
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
I stretcht thy joints to make thee even feet,  
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet;  
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun cloth, i' th' house I find.  
In this array, 'mongst vulgars mayst thou roam  
In critics hands, beware thou dost not come;  
And take thy way where yet thou art not known,  
If for thy father askt, say, thou hadst none:  
And for thy mother, she alas is poor,  
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

1994 Poems: "To Helen" (Edgar Allan Poe) and "Helen" (H.D.)

**Prompt:** 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 Edgar Allan Poe**

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfum'd 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 Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the beauty of fair Greece,  
And the grandeur of old Rome.

Lo ! in that little window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand!  
The folded scroll within thy hand —  
A Psyche from the regions which  
Are Holy land !

### **Helen by H. D.**

All Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre 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.