

Examples of Poetry Selections and Student Essays

Poetry Selection 1

Most of the poetry questions on the exam have used complete poems, usually lyrics of 14 to 50 lines. But a few questions have been based on selections from longer poems such as Pope's "Moral Essays" or Wordsworth's "The Prelude." The poem used in 1990 was an excerpt from Shakespeare's "Henry IV, Part II." This play was chosen because it's almost never taught in the high schools. The examiners are at pains to select poetry that is like the poetry taught in AP classes but that is not likely to have been used in the classroom.

- How many thousand of my poorest subjects
 Are at this hour asleep! O sleep! O gentle sleep!
 Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
 That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
 (5) And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
 Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
 Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
 And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
 Than in the perfum'd chambers of the great,
 (10) Under the canopies of costly state,
 And lull'd with sound of sweetest melody?
 O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile
 In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch
 A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell?
 (15) Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
 Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
 In cradle of the rude imperious surge,
 And in the visitation of the winds,
 Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
 (20) Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them
 With deaf'ning clamour in the slippery clouds,
 That with the hurly death itself awakes?
 Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
 To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
 (25) And in the calmest and most stillest night,
 With all appliances and means to boot,
 Deny it to a King? Then, happy low, lie down!
 Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.