

Overview

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Overview This question asked students to read carefully a poem by Marilyn Nelson Waniek entitled "The Century Quilt" and to write an essay analyzing how Waniek employs literary techniques to develop the complex meanings attributed by the speaker to the quilt. The prompt mentioned structure, imagery and tone as examples of the poet's techniques. With its phrasing, the question was intended to lead students to consider complexities in the quilt's meanings for the speaker. Although a bedcovering may generally be regarded as warm and comforting, the prompt urged students to find other dimensions of meaning: the speaker's identity as shaped and expressed in a family of multiple colors; the power of the past, of imagination and of dreams to create the future; and the links among generations. The prompt asked students to consider how the poet creates these multiple meanings through the use of literary elements, intending to test their abilities to articulate the connections between technique and meaning. Sample: 1A Score: 7

Characterized by sentence variety and command of the elements of writing, this insightful response begins with an economical introduction that transforms the prompt and lists techniques to be analyzed. After two sentences we know something about the nature of the poem ("a beautifully structured meditation"), something about its meaning ("the importance of the history behind a quilt"), and something about each technique under consideration. Integrating structural concerns with the poem's "narrative and personal quality," the first body paragraph offers a mature discussion of how the music of Waniek's poem conveys meaning: the lack of rhyme and meter add up to "a narrative and personal quality"; "the break after 'myself' implies contemplation." The third paragraph sustains the essay's

effectiveness by addressing the importance of color: " In questioning what she would dream of sleeping under it, she imagines the quilt would evoke memories of her ' father's burnt umber pride'. " Again we see the student incorporating quotations smoothly in the service of interpretation, and the discussion of " a reminiscent tone" in the next paragraph continues the citation-interpretation pattern characteristic of the whole essay. In just a few sentences we learn " that it can be inferred she still feels like a child wrapped in [the quilt]" and that the name of the quilt is itself meaningful. For the speaker, the evocative past exists alongside " her longing to see the future. " The conclusion returns to the poet, who " allow[s] the quilt to become part of her life, and her life to become part of the quilt. " Note that further development of the complexity of the poem is possible in this otherwise impressive effort. The colors of the quilt stand for " family and love, " the essay maintains, but there is no discussion of the ways in which the quilt also evokes painful f