

## Kubus AP English Literature, On the Poetry of a Single Poet

About 10 years ago, Dartmouth College researchers put out a call to computer scientists from around the world to develop AI that could write a poem that passes the Turing Test—that is to say, a poem that is virtually indistinguishable from one generated by the human mind. Their algorithms written and poems generated, scientists submitted the bot-poems to a panel of English professors along with a control group of comparable poems written by human beings. 100% of the time, you might be happy to know, the panel could distinguish between the poem written by a human and the poem written by a computer. There's something, it seems, about poetry that robots can't quite master: While they can rhyme, use figurative language, express emotion, maintain rhythm and rhyme; they struggle to maintain a unified conceit. It's nice to think—to my mind anyway—there's something we can do that AI cannot. For now, anyway.



Making poetry is one of the most human things we can do, and this project asks you to explore the work of a single poet, learning about the poet's background, their poetic philosophy and tendencies, the periods in their career; and to study two or three of their poems in great detail. Most of you took this course, I'm aware, because you're invested in novels, stories, and plays, but the study of literature requires a great deal of time spent with poetry, the art form that packs raw human emotion into the smallest of literary spaces. So, have the courage to branch out and try something new, to discover what you never knew you didn't know, and to see what you think about poetry as you think it. Have the courage to be less than perfect. Developing your ability to think for yourself isn't easy. No one ever said it was.

**When?** When you're good and ready

**What?** A 1500-2500-word essay on the poetry of a single poet

**Why?** It's 2, 100-point grades.

## How it's done

**(1) Choose** one of the following poets:

Sir Philip Sidney	William Shakespeare	John Donne	Robert Herrick	Anne Bradstreet	Andrew Marvell	William Blake	William Wordsworth
S.T. Coleridge	Lord Byron	Percy Shelley	John Clare	John Keats	Walt Whitman	Emily Dickinson	G.M. Hopkins
W.B. Yeats	Siegfried Sassoon	T.S. Eliot	Langston Hughes	Theodore Roethke	Richard Wright	Robert Hayden	Dylan Thomas
Gwendolyn Brooks	Richard Wilbur	Wisława Symborska	Claude McKay	Sylvia Plath	Seamus Heaney	Robert Pinsky	Billy Collins

**(2) Learn** about your chosen poet's life, philosophy, poetic influences and idiosyncrasies, the movements of which they're a part, and their most famous poems. For this, I recommend beginning with the Poetry Foundation, a free-for-you, bottomless resource to discover poets and their poems. After that, do a targeted search online, using the domain-specific extension site:.edu, to weed the weeds of the web. The first step in this research portion of this essay is to accumulate material and document the quotations you might want to include as secondary material in your own essay.

**(3) Read and think** about at least 3 or 4 of the most representative poems of your chosen poet, identifying trends and characteristics of your poet's canon. What are the thematic and/or stylistic similarities in the poems? This will be vital when you sit down to write your argument about your poet's poetry.

**(4) Write.** In this ChatGPT world, you're going to need to find ways to identify yourself as a human. So, STOP writing like an algorithm and learn to write like a human. Learn to write an essay that thinks in topics rather than 5 paragraphs, an essay with structure but no formula, an essay in which clarity and good common sense rule.

I like to think of a writer needing to perform a series of actions in an essay:

OPEN

INFORM

ANALYZE

CONTEXTUALIZE

ANALYZE

COMPARE/CONTRAST

GENERALIZE TO CLOSE

Those actions are completed in paragraphs, your units of thinking. Let the units of thinking and argument determine the number of ¶s and their content, order, and length. Remember that all ¶s don't have to be of equal length or serve the same function. You might, for example, write short transition ¶s to move from one topic to another or to sum up your argument before moving to your next idea. Let the argument, the way you make it guide ¶s. And remember that developing ¶s follow the same structure. Use that structure to your advantage.

As you write, integrate your sources in the right way. Your reader should know how and why you're using every quotation and every reference to your sources. That means integrating them and situating primary text quotes just as you've done all year. Remember that this essay MUST have at least two paragraphs of close poetry analysis.

And follow MLA guidelines for parenthetical citation, being very, very careful to *cite every use of every source* and to be diligent and meticulous in citation. You must make dead clear that you've used a source, which source you've used, and how you've used that source, including whether you've quoted any words or followed the original's sentence structure. Be attentive to plagiarism, which can creep into your essay when you're sloppy. Scholars are an honest lot, always tipping their hats to sources. Follow their lead. The consequences of plagiarism are serious and dire, possibly even mortal.

**(5) Proof** your work.

**(6) Title** your essay. Use the formula: "Revenge of a mortal hand": On the Poetry of Wisława Szymborska