

Welcome to AP Literature's Summer Reading Assignment for the '23-'24 school year!

The 10 poems I am asking you to read and annotate this summer are a diverse bunch, and it is my hope that you find one or more that moves you. I recommend that you tackle one poem a week this summer, so you can approach the work with patience and curiosity, rather than panic -- which could interfere with your effort to explore poems worthy of your time. I beg you -- don't put this off! Each of these pieces has been chosen because it is rich, engaging, challenging and beautiful. If you wait until the last minute, you will not be fully prepared to engage in class discussions the first week of school.

Yes, you need to bring in your completed summer homework on the last day of the first week of school.

SUMMER HOMEWORK: 10 poems considered and annotated legibly, by hand. DUE 8 SEPTEMBER.

One important ability of your AP Lit teacher you need to understand immediately: I already know what SparkNotes, CliffsNotes, Study.com can tell me about these poems. I want to know what YOU think and wonder about. Reject your impulse to impress me with what the "experts" know. I disagree heartily with some of the easy "answers" on these text-digested-to-pablum sites, and have already studied many of the true experts; instead, I want to be impressed by YOUR original thinking. Each reader brings something different to the page they read. I want to know what YOU find -- which will be partially based on what YOU bring to the piece.

If you diligently follow the directions on page two for each one of the 10 poems, I am positive you will impress me.

I do not want you to do this summer work with a friend, peer, mentor, parent, guardian or tutor.

Of course you may share the poems with friends and family, or ponder some of the more difficult language with a tutor or a friend. Just make sure that the thinking and the writing is your own.

NOTE: There are some pages in the packet that have a few poems by the same author. You are required to select just ONE of the poems by each author to explore.

For each of your 10 poems, follow the directions on page 2: "One Way to Read a Poem."

This "way" of reading a poem comes from a poet's perspective, not an AP Literature lecture. Not to worry, though; we will have time to practice several AP-approved techniques in the fall. 😊

One way to read a poem - specific directions are bolded

1. READ the poem you have selected several times to get a feel for the "tone" -- the author's attitude toward their subject. (In other words, what is (your poet's) attitude toward the subject in *this* poem? **At the bottom of the poem, write down five adjectives -- TONE WORDS -- that describe that attitude: reach for specific adjectives, not vague ones.**

2. Attend to the MUSIC of the poem. **Listen and ANNOTATE for repetition, assonance, consonance, alliteration, rhyme, and half-rhyme.** We will talk about the connection between music and meaning in the fall. By annotate I simply mean label. (If you are not familiar with the poetic terms above, please look them up in the [Glossary of Poetic Terms](#) on the Poetry Foundation website.)

3. Locate the SHIFT or SHIFTS of the poem. Other names for the "shift" are "fulcrum," "hinge," "turn," or "volta." There may be *more* than one shift in a poem, but there is always *at least* one. It's a turn in the author's thought and/or the poem's developing sense. A shift may alert the reader to an insight or reveal a different perspective. A shift may occur at the beginning of a new stanza, (or not) and may be preceded by signaling words such as: *but, yet, however* (or not). **ANNOTATE (label) the shift. Briefly explain WHY you believe the poem "turns" right there and WHAT the new perspective reveals (in 3-5 sentences). May you write more? Sure!**

4. Slowly RE-READ the poem again (you should know it pretty well by now). Look, listen, and feel for the white-hot CENTER of this poem. Where do you find the impulse of this poem? What is the INSIGHT or striking IMAGE that reveals something about what or where this poem came from? Where do you believe the POWER of the poem resides? **Find the center that speaks TO YOU, and tell me what it means TO YOU (in 3 - 5 sentences). May you write more? Sure!**

OPTIONAL but highly recommended: read a classic novel this summer! Not sure what to read? Check out the AP LIT [list of recommended texts](#). Next fall we will be reading selections from the following list: so please wait to discover them with us! *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett, *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy, *The Tragedy of Hamlet* by Shakespeare, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *Fences* by August Wilson, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. Texts we don't have time to read as a class you may select for one or both of your Independent Reading Projects (IRPs). More on this next fall.

Questions? Join SummerLIT [@litpoems](#) on Remind.

I cannot wait to meet you and hear what you think of these poems! Ciao, summer scholars!

For other fruits, my father was indifferent.
He'd point at the cherry trees and say,
"See those? I wish they were figs."
In the evening he sat by my beds
weaving folktales like vivid little scarves.
They always involved a figtree.
Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.
Once Joha¹ was walking down the road
and he saw a fig tree.
Or, he tied his camel to a fig tree and went to sleep.
Or, later when they caught and arrested him,
his pockets were full of figs.

At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged.
"That's not what I'm talking about!" he said,
"I'm talking about a fig straight from the earth –
gift of Allah! -- on a branch so heavy
it touches the ground.
I'm talking about picking the largest, fattest,
sweetest fig
in the world and putting it in my mouth."
(Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

Years passed, we lived in many houses,
none had figtrees.
We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets.
"Plant one!" my mother said.
but my father never did.
He tended garden half-heartedly, forgot to water,
let the okra get too big.
"What a dreamer he is. Look how many
things he starts and doesn't finish."

The last time he moved, I got a phone call,
My father, in Arabic, chanting a song
I'd never heard. "What's that?"
He took me out back to the new yard.
There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,
a tree with the largest, fattest,
sweetest fig in the world.
"It's a figtree song!" he said,
plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,
emblems, assurance
of a world that was always his own.

¹- A trickster figure in Palestinian folktales

tone words:

i've seen what they make of you
how they render you a multiplicity
of mistakes

they have undone me as well
pulled back my shell & feasted
on my flesh

claimed it was for their survival
& they wonder why I only show my face
every seventeen years

but you

you're lucky if they let you live that long
i could teach you some things, you know
have been playing this game since before

you knew what breath was
this here is prehistoric
why you think we fly?

why you think we roll in packs?
you think these swarms are for the fun of it?
i would tell you that you don't roll deep enough

but every time you swarm they shoot
get you some wings, son
get you some wings

TONE WORDS:

I dreaded that first Robin, so

Poem 3

By Emily Dickinson

I dreaded that first Robin, so,
But He is mastered, now,
I'm accustomed to Him grown,
He hurts a little, though—

I thought if I could only live
Till that first Shout got by—
Not all Pianos in the Woods
Had power to mangle me—

I dared not meet the Daffodils—
For fear their Yellow Gown
Would pierce me with a fashion
So foreign to my own—

I wished the Grass would hurry—
So—when 'twas time to see—
He'd be too tall, the tallest one
Could stretch—to look at me—

I could not bear the Bees should come,
I wished they'd stay away
In those dim countries where they go,
What word had they, for me?

They're here, though; not a creature failed—
No Blossom stayed away
In gentle deference to me—
The Queen of Calvary¹—

Each one salutes me, as he goes,
And I, my childish Plumes,
Lift, in bereaved acknowledgment
Of their unthinking Drums—

TONE WORDS:

¹ symbolic of excruciating mental suffering
(The site of Jesus' crucifixion, originally.)

To His Coy Mistress
By Andrew Marvell

Poem 4

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

TONE WORDS:

Baked Goods

BY AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL

Flour on the floor makes my sandals
slip and I tumble into your arms.

Too hot to bake this morning but
blueberries begged me to fold them

into moist muffins. Sticks of rhubarb
plotted a whole pie. The windows

are blown open and a thickfruit tang
sneaks through the wire screen

and into the home of the scowly lady
who lives next door. Yesterday, a man

in the city was rescued from his apartment
which was filled with a thousand rats.

Something about being angry because
his pet python refused to eat. He let the bloom

of fur rise, rise over the little gnarly blue rug,
over the coffee table, the kitchen countertops

and pip through each cabinet, snip
at the stumpy bags of sugar,

the cylinders of salt. Our kitchen is a riot
of pots, wooden spoons, melted butter.

So be it. Maybe all this baking will quiet
the angry voices next door, if only

Poem 5

for a brief whiff. I want our summers

to always be like this—a kitchen wrecked
with love, a table overflowing with baked goods
warming the already warm air. After all the pots

are stacked, the goodies cooled, and all the
counters
wiped clean—let us never be rescued from this
mess.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, "Baked Goods" from
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STONE WORDS:

they thought the field was wasting
and so they gathered the marker rocks and stones and
piled them into a barn they say that the rocks were shaped
some of them scratched with triangles and other forms they
must have been trying to invent some new language they say
the rocks went to build that wall there guarding the manor and
some few were used for the state house
crops refused to grow
i say the stones marked an old tongue and it was called eternity
and pointed toward the river i say that after that collection
no pillow in the big house dreamed i say that somewhere under
here moulders one called alice whose great grandson is old now
too and refuses to talk about slavery i say that at the
masters table only one plate is set for supper i say no seed
can flourish on this ground once planted then forsaken wild
berries warm a field of bones
bloom how you must i say

Lucille Clifton, "mulberry fields" from *Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton*. Copyright © 1991 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of BOA Editions, Ltd., boaeditions.org.

TONE WORDS:

Adam's Curse

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Poem 7

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.'

And thereupon

That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied, 'To be born woman is to know—
Although they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful.'
I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.

There have been lovers who thought love should
be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned
looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'
We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.
I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

Source: *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1989)

TONE WORDS:

Pied Beauty

Poem 8

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

TONE WORDS:

The Caged Skylark

Poem 8

Gerard Manley Hopkins

As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage,
Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells –
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;
This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age.
Though aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage
Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells,
Yet both droop deadly sómetimes in their cells
Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.

Not that the sweet-fowl, song-fowl, needs no rest –
Why, hear him, hear him babble & drop down to his nest,
But his own nest, wild nest, no prison.
Man's spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best,
But uncumberèd: meadow-down is not distressed
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bónes rísen.

TONE WORDS:

The Sea Hides Fish

Poem 9

By Meetra Javed

I cannot go on, eyes closed,
sewn with loose black thread – unraveled
from the night my frock caught on a
thorn tree – Half seeing two countries
that do not see me,
the way I wish to be seen.

On a boat, in the arid air
a child whispers, “The sea hides fish . . .”
A mother who has lost her Maya exclaims,
“Until they swim to the top” –

Strangers ask:
Ghar kaha hain?
“Where is your home”
Like an orphan wandering; *Serif mere undar,*
“Only inside of me”

But there is a home, there was a home, there is a solace
inside the water, inside the blood, inside the water again:
Everything that was once your mother’s womb – now,
You wonder, where is there to go that loves you?

You enter here and cover yourself,
with your own skin, and you enter
there, without a veil – they say
“Have you no shame?”

Look back, and then forward –
I remember when my father showed me,
a proper noun – A Country – does not matter for each has its
own terrain. He worked to climb the mountains at night
of both/
of there – of here . . . dependent on
the light of stars and moon/
just to give his daughter a gift –
of a red bike tied with red balloons.

So I too, grew up
wandered into darkness when the sun
chose not to acknowledge me and
my mother's voice arrested me:
"You must stand on your own two feet."

I told her if I have legs,
there is no longer any use just standing.
I must run – no, stampede: into blackness,
however far or deep.

She said her country told her:
"Only women who are loose
like the bottom of a frock
come out at night." I said no,
I learned from father – that I can be
harder than a rock bouncing on cement.

Even in the dark I can be a fish that lurks
right under the water – who moves
so swiftly, no fisherman can catch.

On a boat, in the arid air
a mother whispers "The sea hides fish . . ."
A child who has lost her mother exclaims,
"Until they swim to the top" –

These countries gift you sturdy arms,
tie your eyes with threads as you
carry rocks, walk between
blood and the water (something like your mother's womb).

You will not tell me, I did not spend a childhood
looking into the windows

of two countries

that did not see
me.

TONE WORDS:

The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.
Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in
I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly
As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.
I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons.

They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff
Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut.
Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in.
The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble,
They pass the way gulls pass inland in their white caps,
Doing things with their hands, one just the same as another,
So it is impossible to tell how many there are.

My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.
They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.
Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage — —
My patent leather overnight case like a black pillbox,
My husband and child smiling out of the family photo;
Their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.

I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat
Stubbornly hanging on to my name and address.
They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations.
Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley
I watched my tea set, my bureaus of linen, my books
Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head.
I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free — —
The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.
Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.
They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,
Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour,
A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.

Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.
The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me
Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,
And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow
Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen.

Before they came the air was calm enough,
Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.
Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.
Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river
Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.
They concentrate my attention, that was happy
Playing and resting without committing itself.

The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.
The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,
And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes
Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.
The water I taste is warm and salty, like the sea,
And comes from a country far away as health.

TONE WORDS:

You are encouraged to bring this packet to school on day one! However, it is actually **DUE** 8 September.
We will be holding a graded discussion on these poems that Friday. If you are unable to make the discussion, or are not finished with the poems, an alternate (written) assignment will be provided for you, so you may air the ideas you have (which others conveyed in their discussion). The alt (written) assignment must be completed by September 15 and completed in room 2236. *It is not a take home assignment.*