

8.8 Developing commentary

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 19 marks**

KEY WORDS sophisticated poetry commentary 高层次评述

Objective

Build the skills to write **sophisticated poetry commentary** 高层次评述.

You must be able to:

- state the three sophisticated moves
- explain what 'broader context' means for a poem
- explain why alternative readings are especially apt in poetry
- avoid claiming sophistication without doing the work

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Three moves

Explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation within a broader context, discuss alternative interpretations, or use relevant analogies.

■ Broader context

For a poem this usually means what the interpretation shows about how the poem works, or about a problem the poem shares with others — not biography or period background dropped in for its own sake.

■ Alternative readings

8.3 established that ambiguity allows different readings. Poetry therefore supplies alternatives constantly, and acknowledging one is often the most natural sophistication move available.

■ Not a claim

Writing “this is significant because it reflects the human condition” claims significance without establishing it. The move must actually connect the reading to something outside it.

2 Practice

2.1 State the three sophisticated moves. [3]

2.2 Explain what “broader context” usually means for a poem. [2]

2.3 Sophistication must be done, not claimed.

(a) State the failure mode. [2]

(b) State why alternatives are especially apt in poetry. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Claiming an interpretation “reflects the human condition” [1]

- **A** claims significance without establishing it
- **B** is a strong move
- **C** is required
- **D** is an analogy

3.2 Alternatives are especially available in poetry because of [1]

- **A** ambiguity
- **B** rhyme
- **C** brevity
- **D** metre

3.3 An essay ends by naming a rival reading and saying why its own explains more.

- State which move this is. [1]
- Explain why it belongs at the end. [2]

3.4 Full free-response task. A poem addresses a photograph of the speaker's grandmother as a young woman. The first twelve lines describe the photograph in the present tense. The last four switch to the past tense and address the grandmother directly, using her first name — a name the speaker says she has never spoken aloud.

Write an essay that argues an interpretation of the poem, developing a **sophisticated** line of reasoning.

Marked on the AP 6-point rubric: **Row A — Thesis (1), Row B — Evidence and Commentary (4), Row C — Sophistication (1).**

[6]

Solutions

2.1 explain significance within a broader context; discuss alternative interpretations; use relevant analogies.

2.2 what the interpretation shows about how the poem works, or about a problem it shares with other texts.

2.3 (a) claiming significance without connecting the reading to anything outside it. (b) ambiguity allows different readings, so alternatives are constantly available.

3.1 A. claimed, not established.

3.2 A. ambiguity.

3.3 (a) discussing an alternative interpretation. (b) the essay's own reading must be established first so the comparison has something to weigh the rival against.

3.4 Row A — Thesis (1). An interpretive, defensible claim. **Earns it:** “The poem’s tenses run backwards from the reader’s expectation — the photograph is present and the living woman is past — so the act of speaking the name is not a reunion but the moment the speaker accepts which of the two she has actually lost.” **Does not:** “The poem is about the speaker’s memories of her grandmother and her feelings of loss.”

Row B — Evidence and Commentary (0–4). The evidence must be **specific and interpreted**. The present-tense description grants the photograph the only continuing life in the poem. The switch to past tense at the turn is where the grandmother becomes a person rather than an image, and the poem pays for that with her death. The first name is the poem’s central evidence: it is intimate and, by the speaker’s own admission, unearned — the intimacy is available only now that it cannot be received. The 4-point response ties the three together into one line of reasoning; the 3-point response reads each acutely but as three separate observations.

Row C — Sophistication (1). This row is the task’s purpose, so the key is what does **not** earn it. Naming several devices does not; a concluding generalisation about memory and photography does not; a single striking sentence does not. It is earned by complexity carried throughout — for example, holding the poem’s uncomfortable suggestion that the speaker prefers the photograph, and reading the direct address as an apology for that preference rather than as an act of love. The alternative reading must be genuinely weighed, not waved at.