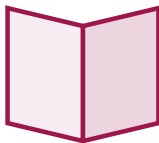


Poetry III

AP English Literature ■ Unit 8

AP English Literature



What we will cover

- 1 The Function of Structure in a Text
- 2 The Function of Contrasts Within a Text
- 3 The Function of Specific Words and Phrases
- 4 The Function of a Symbol
- 5 The Function of a Metaphor
- 6 The Function of an Allusion

1

The Function of Structure in a Text

The Function of Structure in a Text

Original teaching poem — the remaining seed

Our barn is full; the table bare.
“A generous year,” I tell the chair.
The rent has taken every loaf.
I hold one seed against the frost.
I save it only when I spend it:
I open up my fist and sow.
The empty chair receives no answer.
Tomorrow, will the field say no?

Read the complete poem first. This is authored practice, not an AP extract.

The Function of Structure in a Text, continued

Your turn: connect structure and meaning

Compare the first statement with the final question. How do the semicolon in line 1 and the colon after “spend it” connect ideas? Explain one shift without assuming that every punctuation mark has a fixed emotional effect.

Use the actual syntax and context. Attempt before the model.

Finding the turn

A CONJUNCTION — *but, yet, and still*, at the head of a line

A CHANGE OF TENSE
— the poem moves in time

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS —
it starts speaking to someone

A CHANGE OF SCALE — the
particular becomes general, or the reverse

The turn is where the poem stops doing one thing and starts another. Find a change from the **signal**, then explain what it does here

2

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

Three devices built on contradiction

Antithesis	"Barn is full; the table bare places abundance against deprivation.
Verbal irony	"A generous year is undermined as simple praise by rent taking the food.
Paradox	"I save it only when I spend it appears contradictory until sowing explains a way to preserve future supply.

The final question keeps future success uncertain. Do not turn sowing into a guarantee.

Three devices built on contradiction, in detail

What happens to the contradiction? That is the separating question

ANTITHESIS	IRONY	PARADOX
two opposites placed side by side	a mismatch between what is expected and what is	an apparent contradiction that reveals a truth
both remain true in their own terms	test the expectation against the context	explain how context resolves the tension
<i>"Our barn is full; the table bare"</i>	<i>"a generous year" - after we have seen the cost</i>	<i>"I save it only when I spend it" — sowing seed</i>

Name the device, then explain what the actual words support.

Antithesis sets opposites side by side. Irony is a mismatch. A paradox appears contradictory; explain the truth revealed in context

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

- 1 **First contrast** The semicolon connects full production with a bare table in one sentence.
- 2 **Pressure** Rent provides a reason why abundance does not feed the speaker.
- 3 **Response** Opening the fist and sowing turns retained seed into a risk for the future.
- 4 **Ending** The question to the field preserves uncertainty rather than announcing a successful crop.

3

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

Ironic reading	“Generous is bitter praise: rent and the bare table make the year costly.
Narrow literal reading	The barn really is full; the speaker might acknowledge production while questioning who benefits.
Judgement	Explain how the subsequent lines support or complicate each reading rather than merely calling the word ambiguous.

Supported alternative readings may remain in tension. No ambiguity label guarantees a scoring point.

Ambiguity, or vagueness?

AMBIGUITY — in the text

two readings, and the text supports both
you can quote for each
explain the implications of each reading

VAGUENESS — in the reading

one reading, not yet worked out
“this could symbolise many things”
no quotation would settle it either way

Claiming ambiguity is a **commitment** to show both readings. Support each reading with wording and explain its implication

4

The Function of a Symbol

The Function of a Symbol

The empty chair in context

The speaker first addresses the chair and later says it receives no answer. The object may make an absent companion or an unresponsive world felt.

- 1 Evidence** Connect the address, “empty” and “no answer”.
- 2 Perspective** The speaker’s act of addressing gives the object its role in this poem.
- 3 Limit** The poem does not identify a missing person or establish a death. A chair has no universal fixed symbolic meaning.

5

The Function of a Metaphor

The Function of a Metaphor

Original mini poem — worry and a garden

My worry is a garden.
I water every thorn.
At night I prune its shadows;
by morning more are born.

Main subject: worry. Comparison subject: garden. Before the explanation, trace how watering and pruning develop the comparison.

Follow a developed comparison

Watering thorns

Pruning

Shadows

More are born

Attention sustains the very thing that hurts.

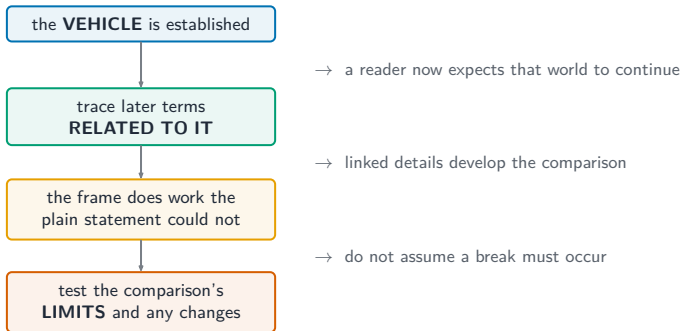
The speaker tries to manage or remove the difficulty.

A complication: these cannot literally be pruned, so control may be elusive.

The recurring growth complicates the success of the effort.

A conceit develops a complex comparison. Follow its relationships and limits; no final break is compulsory.

Follow a developed comparison, in detail



Conceits are often used to make **complex comparisons between the natural world and an individual.**

6

The Function of an Allusion

The Function of an Allusion

Original example with supplied background

“Not Midas: let my hands make bread. In the Midas story, the wished-for golden touch makes food unusable.

- 1 **Recognised reference** Gold that defeats nourishment supplies the contrast.
- 2 **Interpretation** The line can reject unusable wealth in favour of making food.
- 3 **Limit** A reader without the background may notice bread's usefulness but miss this particular reversal.

Symbol, allusion, and citing your sources

Symbol	Explain the contextual association and the perspective it expresses.
Allusion	Identify the reference and explain which associations matter here.
Attribution	Credit borrowed wording and ideas. Distinguish the text, supplied background and your interpretation.

Do not invent textual evidence or promise marks for treating every symbol as a character's conscious choice.

7

Literary argument and evidence

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- 1 **Claim** The remaining-seed poem joins deprivation to uncertain hope.
- 2 **Evidence** Full barn / bare table; rent; saving by sowing; the final question.
- 3 **Reasoning** Material loss prompts action, but sowing does not remove the risk signalled by frost and the ending.
- 4 **Revision** Qualify a claim of triumph: the crop's outcome is unknown.

Worked example – three devices, kept apart

Model commentary on the actual teaching poem

The full barn and bare table place production beside deprivation. Calling the year “generous” can therefore sound bitter once rent takes the food, although the harvest itself remains abundant. The apparent paradox of saving seed by spending it is explained through sowing: future supply requires giving up immediate possession. Frost and the final question prevent that action from becoming certain success. Together the contrasts present a speaker who acts for the future without denying present loss or risk.

Device → actual detail → explained relationship → qualified interpretation. This model carries no guaranteed score.

8

Attribution and composition

Exam tips

- 1 **Structure** Establish a pattern and explain a change through syntax and context.
- 2 **Contrast** Distinguish antithesis, irony and apparent paradox before interpreting them.
- 3 **Ambiguity** Support each plausible reading and explain the remaining tension.
- 4 **Comparison** Trace linked qualities and limits; do not assume a compulsory break.

9

Recap

Unit 8 – key takeaways

1

Pattern

establish it, then find the interruption

2

Punctuation

a claim about how tightly statements join

3

Three devices

antithesis, irony, paradox – not synonyms

4

Ambiguity

support each reading; explain any tension

Check yourself

- 1 **Structure** How does the colon help explain “I save it only when I spend it”?
- 2 **Contrast** Explain why full barn / bare table differs from the seed paradox.
- 3 **Ending** Which words prevent a claim of guaranteed recovery?
- 4 **Evidence** What does the empty chair suggest, and what does it not establish?