Short Form: Poem

1. MLA entry

2. Paraphrase each line: What is the most obvious statement you can make about the situation that the poem concerns itself with? Do not scare yourself with “deep meaning”: **start literally. Paraphrase the poem.**

3. Poetic précis

4. Speaker of the poem: What do you know about the speaker? How do you know it? Does he/she change?

5. Discuss the poem’s form: stanzas, rhyme scheme, etc:

6. Structure: How did the poet organize the poem, and why? Is it a question and an answer? Is it a story? Is it a list? Is it a conversation? Is it a description? Where (emotionally speaking) does the poem begin and where does it end? Be willing to be surprised. Things often happen in poems to turn them around. A poem may seem to suggest one thing at first, then persuade you of its opposite, or at least of a significant change or qualification. Discuss the “journey” the poem takes from beginning to end.

7. Literary devices used in the poem and the effect: What metaphors, similes, images does the poem use? When and why does the speaker use them? Keep in mind that a poet uses figurative language when more literal ways of speaking seem inadequate or inappropriate. Discuss what further dimensions of human experience can be delved into when the literal gives way to the figurative. (note well: both metaphors and similes are essentially comparisons: say what is being compared to what and why.)

8. Diction-

-Sounds of the words: Listen to the **sounds** of the poem. Does it rhyme? Does it use alliteration (repetition of beginning consonant sounds)? Does it have an interesting rhythm? What do the words sound like? Are they smooth, or harsh, or lilting, or dull? Do they move quickly or slowly?

-Connotation (choose three words): Be very alert to **word choice**. Discuss the kinds of language the poet uses. Are they simple and everyday words? words from a particular occupation or walk of life? are they slang words? abstract? philosophical? from religion, or sports, or banking? from the world of nature or love or domestic life, or politics or painting or childhood or computers or psychology or law? From what “world” of experience does a group of words derive? Be alert to unusual words or usual words used in an unusual way. Try to say why this word is effective, what kind of very particular meaning it communicates, what it suggests. Try substituting a synonym of the word and explain to yourself why the poet’s choice serves his/her purpose better.

-Repetition: Be alert to repetitions of any kind: a repeated word, a repeated sound, a repeated idea, punctuation, part-of-speech, syntactical arrangement. Since repetition always serves to emphasize, what is being emphasized and why?

9. Tone of the poem

10. Theme of the poem: Its “theme” will be that part of it that communicates more widely, that tries to say a “truth.” Be careful that you don’t reduce the poem to a cliché. Don’t turn corny or glib. Good poems record hard-won and sometimes devastating “truths.” Reading them well makes us struggle to know, feel, and express those things about living that are not easy to know, feel, or express.