Poetry Pairs, Triplets, Quads: 
a look at poetry that fits together

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Compare two poems

**Piazza Piece**  (John Crowe Ransom)
— I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying
To make you hear. Your ears are soft and small
And listen to an old man not at all,
They want the young men's whispering and sighing.
But see the roses on your trellis dying
And hear the spectral singing of the moon;
For I must have my lovely lady soon,
I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying.

— I am a lady young in beauty waiting
Until my truelove comes, and then we kiss.
But what gray man among the vines is this
Whose words are dry and faint as in a dream?
Back from my trellis, Sir, before I scream!
I am a lady young in beauty waiting.

**When I Was One-and-Twenty**
By A. E. Housman

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
“Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.”

But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
“The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
’Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue.”
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, ’tis true, ’tis true. 15

Compare two poems

688 Song  Thomas Lovell Beddoes. 1803–1849

How many times do I love thee, dear?
Tell me how many thoughts there be
    In the atmosphere
    Of a new-fall’n year,
Whose white and sable hours appear  5
    The latest flake of Eternity: --
So many times do I love thee, dear.

How many times do I love again?
Tell me how many beads there are
    In a silver chain 10
    Of evening rain,
Unravelled from the tumbling main,
    And threading the eye of a yellow star: --
So many times do I love again.

Sonnet XLIII. How do I love thee?
by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  5
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with a passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. 10
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, --- I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! --- and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.
Compare two poems

My Papa's Waltz  Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans 5
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist 10
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed 15
Still clinging to your shirt.

good times  Lucille Clifton

my daddy has paid the rent
and the insurance man is gone
and the lights is back on
and my uncle brud has hit
for one dollar straight 5
and they is good times
and they is good times
good times

good times

my mama has made bread
and grampaw has come
and everybody is drunk
and dancing in the kitchen
and singing in the kitchen
of these is good times 15
good times

good times
oh children think about the
good times

Compare two poems

**You Are Happy**  by Margaret Atwood

The water turns
a long way down over the raw stone,
ice crusts around it

We walk separately
along the hill to the open beach, unused
picnic tables, wind
shoving the brown waves, erosion, gravel rasping on gravel.

In the ditch a deer carcass, no head. Bird
running across the glaring road against the low pink sun.

When you are this cold you can think about
nothing but the cold, the images

hitting into your eyes
like needles, crystals, you are happy.

**Traveling Through The Dark**  William Stafford

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason--
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all--my only swerving--,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

Compare three poems

ANTHEM1 FOR DOOMED YOUTH Wilford Owen

What passing-bells² for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out³ their hasty orisons.⁴
No mockeries⁵ now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –  
The shrill, demented⁶ choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles⁷ calling for them from sad shires.⁸
What candles⁹ may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor¹⁰ of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk¹¹ a drawing-down of blinds.¹²
September - October, 1917

Notes for students
1 Anthem - perhaps best known in the expression "The National Anthem;" also, an important 
religious song (often expressing joy); here, perhaps, a solemn song of celebration
2 passing-bells - a bell tolled after someone's death to announce the death to the world
3 patter out - rapidly speak
4 orisons - prayers, here funeral prayers
5 mockeries - ceremonies which are insults. Here Owen seems to be suggesting that the 
Christian religion, with its loving God, can have nothing to do with the deaths of so many 
thousands of men
6 demented - raving mad
7 bugles - a bugle is played at military funerals (sounding the last post)
8 shires - English counties and countryside from which so many of the soldiers came
9 candles - church candles, or the candles lit in the room where a body lies in a coffin
10 pallor - paleness
11 dusk has a symbolic significance here
12 drawing-down of blinds - normally a preparation for night, but also, here, the tradition of drawing the blinds in a room where a dead person lies, as a sign to the world and as a mark of respect. The coming of night is like the drawing down of blinds.

XIX. To an Athlete Dying Young by A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come, 5
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields were glory does not stay 10
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers 15
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man. 20

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head 25
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.
The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner  Randall Jarrell

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

"A ball turret was a Plexiglas sphere set into the belly of a B-17 or B-24, and inhabited by two .50 caliber machine-guns and one man, a short small man. When this gunner tracked with his machine guns a fighter attacking his bomber from below, he revolved with the turret; hunched upside-down in his little sphere, he looked like the foetus in the womb. The fighters which attacked him were armed with cannon firing explosive shells. The hose was a steam hose." -- Jarrell’s note.

The poem was published in 1945. Why is that relevant to its meaning?

Compare two poems

CalN Irving Layton, 1958

Taking the air rifle from my son's hand
I measured back five paces, the Hebrew
In me, narcissist, father of children
Laid to rest. From there I took aim and fired.
The silent ball hit the frog's back an inch
Below the head. He jumped at the surprise
Of it, suddenly tickled or startled
(He must have thought) and leaped from the wet sand
Into the surrounding brown water. But
The ball had done its mischief. His next spring
Was a miserable flop, the thrust all gone
Out of his legs. He tried - like Bruce - again,
Throwing out his sensitive pianist's
Hands as a dwarf might or a helpless child.
His splash disturbed the quiet pondwater
And one old frog behind his weedy moat
Blinking, looking self-complacently on.
The lin's surface at once became closing
Eyelids and bubbles like notes of music
Liquid, luminous, dropping from the page
White, white-bearded, a rapid crescendo
Of inaudible sounds and a crones' whispering
Backstage among the reeds and bullrushes
As for an expiring Lear or Oedipus.

But Death makes us all look ridiculous.
Consider this frog (dog, hog, what you will) 25
Sprawling, his absurd corpse rocked by the tides
That his last vain spring had set in movement.
Like a retired oldster, I couldn't help sneer,
Living off the last of his insurance:
Billows - now crumbling - the premiums paid. 30
Absurd, how absurd. I wanted to kill
At the mockery of it, Kill and kill
Again -- the self-infatuate frog, dog, hog,
Anything with the stir of life in it,
Seeing that dead leaper, Chaplin-footed,
Rocked and cradled in this afternoon
Of tranquil water, reeds, and blazing sun,
The hole in his back clearly visible
And the torn skin a blob of shadow
Moving when the quiet poolwater moved. 40

0 Egypt, marbled Greece, resplendent Rome,
Did you also finally perish from a small bore
In your back you could not scratch? And would
Your mouths open ghostily, gasping out
Among the murky reeds, the hidden frogs,
We climb with crushed spines toward the heavens? 45
When the next morning I came the same way
The frog was on his back, one delicate
Hand on his belly, and his white shirt front
Spotless. He looked as if he might have been
A comic; tap dancer apologizing
For a fall, or an Emcee, his wide grin
Coaxing a laugh from us for an aside
Or perhaps a joke we didn't quite hear.

The Death of a Toad
Richard Wilbur

A toad the power mower caught,
Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got
To the garden verge, and sanctuaried him
Under the cineraria leaves, in the shade
Of the ashen and heartshaped leaves, in a dim, 5
Low, and a final glade.
The rare original heartsbleed goes,
Spends in the earthen hide, in the folds and wizenings, flows
In the gutters of the banked and staring eyes. He lies
As still as if he would return to stone,  
And soundlessly attending, dies
Toward some deep monotone,
Toward misted and ebullient seas
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.
Day dwindles, drowning and at length is gone
In the wide and antique eyes, which still appear
To watch, across the castrate lawn,  
The haggard daylight steer.

**Compare these three poems**

**The Sun Has Set** (Emily Brontë)

THE sun has set, and the long grass now
Waves dreamily in the evening wind;
And the wild bird has flown from that old gray stone
In some warm nook a couch to find.

In all the lonely landscape round
I see no light and hear no sound,
Except the wind that far away
Come sighing o'er the healthy sea.

**All Day I Hear the Noise of Waters** (James Joyce)

All day I hear the noise of waters
Making moan,
Sad as the sea-bird is when, going
Forth alone,
He hears the winds cry to the water's
Monotone.

The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing
Where I go.
I hear the noise of many waters
Far below.
All day, all night, I hear them flowing
To and fro.
Night
By Louise Bogan

The cold remote islands
And the blue estuaries
Where what breathes, breathes
The restless wind of the inlets,
And what drinks, drinks
The incoming tide;

Where shell and weed
Wait upon the salt wash of the sea,
And the clear nights of stars
Swing their lights westward
To set behind the land;

Where the pulse clinging to the rocks
Renews itself forever;
Where, again on cloudless nights,
The water reflects
The firmament’s partial setting;

—O remember
In your narrowing dark hours
That more things move
Than blood in the heart.

Compare these four poems

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls  By E. E. Cummings

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds
(also, with the church's protestant blessings
daughters, unscented shapeless spirited)
you believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead,
you are invariably interested in so many things—
at the present writing one still finds
delighted fingers knitting for the is it Poles?
perhaps. While permanent faces coyly bandy
scandal of Mrs. N and Professor D
.... the Cambridge ladies do not care, above
Cambridge if sometimes in its box of
sky lavender and cornerless, the
moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

Sadie and Maud By Gwendolyn Brooks

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn’t leave a tangle in. 5
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name. 10
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
(Sadie had left as heritage 15
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Aunt Helen By T. S. Eliot

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,
And lived in a small house near a fashionable square
Cared for by servants to the number of four.
Now when she died there was silence in heaven
And silence at her end of the street. 5
The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet —
He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.
The dogs were handsomely provided for,
But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.
The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,
And the footman sat upon the dining-table
Holding the second housemaid on his knees —
Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.
My Aunt By Oliver Wendell Holmes 1831

My aunt! my dear unmarried aunt!
Long years have o'er her flown;
Yet still she strains the aching clasp
That binds her virgin zone;
I know it hurts her,-- though she looks
As cheerful as she can;
Her waist is ampler than her life,
For life is but a span.

My aunt! my poor deluded aunt!
Her hair is almost gray;
Why will she train that winter curl
In such a spring-like way?
How can she lay her glasses down,
And say she reads as well,
When through a double convex lens
She just makes out to spell?

Her father-- grandpapa! forgive
This erring lip its smiles--
Vowed she should make the finest girl
Within a hundred miles;
He sent her to a stylish school
'T was in her thirteenth June;
And with her, as the rules required,
"Two towels and a spoon."

They braced my aunt against a board,
To make her straight and tall;
They laced her up, they starved her down,
To make her light and small;
They pinched her feet, they singed her hair,
They screwed it up with pins ;--
Oh, never mortal suffered more
In penance for her sins.

So, when my precious aunt was done,
My grandsire brought her back
(By daylight, lest some rabid youth
Might follow on the track;)
"Ah!" said my grandsire, as he shook
Some powder in his pan,
"What could this lovely creature do
Against a desperate man!"

Alas! nor chariot, nor barouche,
Nor bandit cavalcade,
Tore from the trembling father's arms
His all-accomplished maid.
For her how happy had it been!
And Heaven had spared to me
To see one sad, ungathered rose
On my ancestral tree.
ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours
Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The poems below, published in 1789 and 1794, were written by William Blake in response to the condition of chimney sweeps. Usually small children, sweeps were forced inside chimneys to clean their interiors. Read the two poems carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, compare and contrast the two poems, taking into consideration the poetic techniques Blake uses in each.

The Chimney Sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "weep! weep! weep! weep!"*
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curl’d like a lambs back, was shav’d, so I said,
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun;

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

* The child’s lisping attempt at the chimney sweep’s street cry,
"Sweep! Sweep!"

The Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow
Crying "weep, weep," in notes of woe!
“Where are thy father & mother? say?”
“They are both gone up to the church to pray.

“Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil’d among the winter’s snow;
They clothéd me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

“And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.”


(1794)


(1789)
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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following two poems, adults provide explanations for children. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing how each poet uses literary devices to make his point.

A Barred Owl
The warping night air having brought the boom
Of an owl’s voice into her darkened room,
We tell the wakened child that all she heard
Was an odd question from a forest bird,
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,
“Who cooks for you?” and then “Who cooks for you?”

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,
Can also thus domesticate a fear,
And send a small child back to sleep at night
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

—Richard Wilbur

The History Teacher

Trying to protect his students’ innocence he told them the Ice Age was really just the Chilly Age, a period of a million years when everyone had to wear sweaters.

And the Stone Age became the Gravel Age, named after the long driveways of the time.

The Spanish Inquisition was nothing more than an outbreak of questions such as “How far is it from here to Madrid?”

“What do you call the matador’s hat?”

The War of the Roses took place in a garden, and the Enola Gay dropped one tiny atom on Japan.

The children would leave his classroom
for the playground to torment the weak and the smart,
Mussing up their hair and breaking their glasses, while he gathered up his notes and walked home past flower beds and white picket fences,

wondering if they would believe that soldiers in the Boer War told long, rambling stories designed to make the enemy nod off.

—Billy Collins


■ The name of the airplane from which an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945.
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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the two poems below, Keats and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his particular situation.

Mezzo Cammin1

Written at Boppard on the Rhine August 25, 1842, 
Just Before Leaving for Home

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
The aspiration of my youth, to build
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.

Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—
A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
And hear above me on the autumnal blast
The cataract2 of Death far thundering from the heights.

1842 —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

1 The title is from the first line of Dante’s Divine Comedy: “Nel mezzo
del cammin di nostra vita” (“Midway upon the journey of our life”).

2 A large waterfall

When I Have Fears

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean’d my teeming brain,
Hold like rich garners the full ripen’d grain;
When I behold, upon the night’s starr’d face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

1818 —John Keats (1795-1821)