

## Speaker/Narrator/Character Perspective

Read the following poem by Tracy K. Smith, poet laureate of the United States from 2017 to 2019 and current professor of creative writing at Princeton University. She happens to be African American. Her race is important for this lesson because the speaker in “The United States Welcomes You” is not African American, but rather a person of power who doesn’t welcome outsiders.

Read the poem below focusing on the speaker’s perspective, how it is revealed, and whether it shifts. Then complete the chart analyzing both the speaker and audience’s perspective. For purposes of this lesson, the audience serves as characters whom the speaker addresses. Even though these unnamed characters do not speak, they act. Look for signals from the speaker that will give you hints about the characters’ actions. The first four have been filled in with possible responses. You should feel free to replace them with other ideas.

The United States Welcomes You  
by Tracy K. Smith

Why and by whose power were you sent?  
 What do you see that you might want to steal?  
 Why this dancing? Why do your dark bodies  
 Drink up all the light? What are you demanding  
 That we feel? Have you stolen something? Then 5  
 What is that leaping in your chest? What is  
 The nature of your mission? Do you seek  
 To offer a confession? Have you anything to do  
 With others brought by us to harm? Then  
 Why are you afraid? And why do you invade 10  
 Our night, hands raised, eyes wide, mute  
 As ghosts? Is there something you wish to confess?  
 Is this some enigmatic type of test? What if we  
 Fail? How and to whom do we address our appeal?

Text	Speaker/Narrator Perspective	Character Perspective
The United States Welcomes You	U.S. welcomes all people	N/A
Why and by whose power were you sent?	Questions the legitimacy of outside groups	N/A
What do you see that you might want to steal?	Believes African Americans or Immigrants are thieves	N/A

Why this dancing?	Doesn't approve of cultural practices of African Americans or immigrants.	Continue to practice traditions from their place of origin.
Why do your dark bodies Drink up all the light?	Resents people of color	N/A
What are you demanding That we feel?	Does not want to feel empathy for African Americans or immigrants	Want to be treated as humans
Have you stolen something?	Returns to the generalization that not of the dominant culture are thieves.	N/A
Then What is that leaping in your chest?	Assumes the beating hearts were stolen	Merely living as all people do
What is The nature of your mission?	Appears to listen to the immigrant voices	Have gone before the authorities to plead their case which could range from economic to legal concerns.
Do you seek To offer a confession?	Accuses immigrants of wrong doing	N/A
Have you anything to do With others brought by us to harm?	Is aware that harm has been done to people by the speaker's group	N/A
Then Why are you afraid?	Believes the law will protect everyone even though it has allowed people to be harmed	Is skeptical of equal protection under the law
And why do you invade Our night, hands raised, eyes wide, mute As ghosts?	Doesn't understand why the oppressed would rebel	Rebelling
Is there something you wish to confess?	Believes in their guilt	N/A
Is this some enigmatic type of test?	Doesn't understand why the oppressed are not accepting their position	Demanding justice
What if we Fail?	Is afraid of the new order	Protest is growing louder

How and to whom do we address our appeal?	Uncertain and doesn't want to change	N/A
---	--------------------------------------	-----

### Shifting Perspectives and Comparisons

Perspectives often shift as characters encounter new environments, ideas, or experiences. In “The United States Welcomes You” the perspectives of both the speaker and the characters shift. Furthermore, the speaker’s comparison of the characters to ghosts reveals a disregard for the characters as humans with equal rights and opportunities. The characters have a difficult struggle to gain respect and the American promise of equal justice under the law.

The chart below delineates some of the key shifts for both the speaker and the characters.

Line	Interpretation of the Shift
<p>“What are you demanding That we feel?” (Lines 4-5)</p> <p>“Have you stolen something?” (Line 6)</p>	The speaker shifts from accusing the characters/audience of unlawful behavior to apparently listening to their wishes, but returns to accusations in line 6. The speaker is condescending and insincere.
“What is The nature of your mission?” (Lines 6-7)	The characters have evidently put their wishes before the authority of the speaker. These could range from economic concerns to legal ones.
<p>“And why do you invade Our night, hands raised, eyes wide, mute As ghosts?” (Lines 10-12)</p>	<p>These lines are significant for both the speaker and the characters. The characters are no longer talking but are actively protesting. Talking has not worked.</p> <p>The fact that the speaker compares the characters to ghosts takes the dehumanization to a new level. They are no longer living, breathing humans, but rather scary and unable to communicate in a language the speaker understands.</p>
“What if we Fail?” (Lines 13-14)	For the first time the speaker shows some vulnerability.
“How and to whom do we address our appeal?” (Line 14)	In the end the speaker does not change perspectives on the characters’ legitimacy. Even though uncertain of what to do next, the speaker is looking for validation of his elitist perspective.

## The Hill We Climb

Amanda Gorman

When day comes we ask ourselves,  
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?  
The loss we carry,  
a sea we must wade.  
We've braved the belly of the beast,  
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace,  
and the norms and notions  
of what just is  
isn't always just-ice.  
And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it.  
Somehow we do it.  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken,  
but simply unfinished.  
We the successors of a country and a time  
where a skinny Black girl  
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother  
can dream of becoming president  
only to find herself reciting for one.  
And yes we are far from polished.  
Far from pristine.  
But that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect.  
We are striving to forge a union with purpose,  
to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and  
conditions of man.  
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,  
but what stands before us.  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside.  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms  
to one another.  
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.  
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true,  
that even as we grieved, we grew,  
that even as we hurt, we hoped,  
that even as we tired, we tried,  
that we'll forever be tied together, victorious.  
Not because we will never again know defeat,  
but because we will never again sow division.  
Scripture tells us to envision

that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree  
and no one shall make them afraid.  
If we're to live up to our own time,  
then victory won't lie in the blade.  
But in all the bridges we've made,  
that is the promise to glade,  
the hill we climb.  
If only we dare.  
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it.  
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation  
rather than share it.  
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.  
And this effort very nearly succeeded.  
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,  
it can never be permanently defeated.  
In this truth,  
in this faith we trust.  
For while we have our eyes on the future,  
history has its eyes on us.  
This is the era of just redemption  
we feared at its inception.  
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour  
but within it we found the power  
to author a new chapter.  
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves.  
So while once we asked,  
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?  
Now we assert,  
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?  
We will not march back to what was,  
but move to what shall be.  
A country that is bruised but whole,  
benevolent but bold,  
fierce and free.  
We will not be turned around  
or interrupted by intimidation,  
because we know our inaction and inertia  
will be the inheritance of the next generation.  
Our blunders become their burdens.  
But one thing is certain,  
If we merge mercy with might,  
and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy,

and change our children's birthright.  
So let us leave behind a country  
better than the one we were left with.  
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,  
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.  
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west.  
We will rise from the windswept northeast,  
where our forefathers first realized revolution.  
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states.  
We will rise from the sunbaked south.  
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover.  
And every known nook of our nation and  
every corner called our country,  
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,  
battered and beautiful.  
When day comes we step out of the shade,  
afame and unafraid,  
the new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it.

Youtube link to PBS's Recording of Amanda Gorman at President Biden's Inauguration

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055iIiN4&ab\\_channel=PBSNewsHour](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055iIiN4&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour)

# Absurdist Poetry

Directions: Each of these modern poets grapple with some of the same issues as does Hamlet. After we read each poem and briefly discuss it, individually identify a conflict that each deals with and write a thematic statement that includes the speaker's philosophical response to it.

## Don't Let That Horse

by: Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Don't let that horse  
eat that violin  
cried Chagall's mother  
But he  
kept right on  
painting  
And became famous  
And kept on painting  
The Horse With Violin in Mouth  
And when he had finished it  
he jumped up upon the horse  
and rode it away  
waving the violin  
and then with a low bow gave it  
to the first naked nude he ran across  
And there were no strings attached

Thematic Topic (Conflict):

Thematic Statement:

Thesis Statement:

Connection to Works Read this Year:

## Polonius

by: Miroslav Holub

Behind every arras  
he does his duty  
unswervingly.  
Walls are his ears,  
keyholes his eyes.

He slinks up the stairs,  
oozes from the ceiling,  
floats through the door  
ready to give evidence,  
prove what is proven,  
stab with a needle  
or pin on an order.

His poems always rhyme,  
his brush is dipped in honey,  
his music flutes from marzipan and  
cane.

You buy him  
by weight, boneless,  
a pound of wax flesh,  
a pound of mousy philosophy,  
a pound of jellied flunkey.

And when he's sold out  
and the left-overs wrapped  
in a tasseled obituary,  
a paranoid funeral notice.

And when the spore-creating mould  
of memory covers him over,  
when he falls  
arse first to the stars,  
the whole continent will be lighter,  
earth's axis straighten up  
and in night's thunderous arena  
a bird will chirp in gratitude.



Thematic Topic (Conflict):

Thematic Statement:

Thesis Statement:

Connection to Works Read this Year:

## The End of the World

by: Archibald MacLeish

Quite unexpectedly as Vasserot  
The armless ambidextrian was lighting  
A match between his great and second toe  
And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting  
The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum  
Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough  
In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb-  
Quite unexpectedly the top blew off.

And there, there overhead, there, there, hung over  
Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,  
There in the starless dark, the poise, the hover,  
There with vast wings across the canceled skies,  
There in the sudden blackness, the black pall  
Of nothing, nothing, nothing-nothing at all.

Thematic Topic (Conflict):

Thematic Statement:

Thesis Statement:

Connection to Works Read this Year:

Structural Analysis: Chunk each of the three poems by shifts. You may use the list below to look for shifts. Complete a “Says/Does/How” chart for each. After you finish, reflect on how the structure of the poem creates meaning. Revise your initial thesis statement. Choose one of the three poems and write an essay that explains your interpretation of it. Remember a your essay should have a strong thesis, claims that develop the thesis, sufficient evidence to support your claims, and commentary that explains the connection between your claims and evidence. Finally, to earn the sophistication point, your essays must show complex thinking. Consider ways to place your interpretation in a broader context, offer alternative interpretations, or create analogies to illustrate abstract ideas.

<b>Says</b>	<b>Does</b>	<b>How</b>
Paraphrase and summarize each chunk.	Determine the FUNCTION of each chunk.	Identify Literary Devices and ANALYZE their FUNCTION in creating meaning.

**Identifying Shifts:**

- Setting**
- Narrative Voice**
- Paragraphing**
- Punctuation**
- Syntactical Patterns**
- Description vs. Action vs. Dialogue**
- Levels of Language**
- Tone**
- Repetition**
- Time (flashback, flash forward, etc.)**
- Style**
- Pacing**
- Pronouns**
- Setting**
- Narrative Voice**
- Paragraphing**
- Punctuation**
- Syntactical Patterns**
- Description vs. Action vs. Dialogue**
- Levels of Language**
- Tone**
- Repetition**
- Time (flashback, flash forward, etc.)**
- Style**
- Pacing**
- Pronouns**

