Personal Response to a Poem

When you respond to a poem, you think about its meaning, but your focus is personal. You discuss your own reactions, feelings, or experiences as well as the language and style of the poem. The **Writer's Road Map** will show you how.

**WRITER'S ROAD MAP**

**Personal Response to a Poem**

**WRITING PROMPT 1**

**Writing from Literature** Choose a poem that caused strong feelings in you. Write a personal response that explains why the poem made you feel the way you did. Briefly describe the poem so that readers unfamiliar with it can understand your response.

**Poems to Consider**
- "The Highwayman"
- "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out"

**WRITING PROMPT 2**

**Writing for the Real World** Write an essay for a music magazine that describes your response to a song or a type of music. Give readers specific examples to help them understand why the song or type of music is important to you.

**Types of Music to Explore**
- rap or hip-hop
- rock
- country

**KEY TRAITS**

1. **IDEAS**
   - Clearly presents an overall response to the work
   - Supports key points with details and quotations

2. **ORGANIZATION**
   - Identifies the title and author of the work in the introduction
   - Gives enough information about the work for readers to understand the response
   - Includes transitional words and phrases
   - Summarizes the response in a conclusion

3. **VOICE**
   - Tone is honest and engaging

4. **WORD CHOICE**
   - Uses literary terms when describing the work

5. **SENTENCE FLUENCY**
   - Varies sentence beginnings

6. **CONVENTIONS**
   - Uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation

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**WRITING TOOLS**

For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.

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608 UNIT 5: APPRECIATING POETRY
Part 1: Analyze a Student Model

Kenetha Smithson  
Lewiston Middle School

“Sleeping in the Forest”

Some people can’t live for even a single night without the Internet or TV. Camping is definitely not for them. For me, though, nothing beats a night outside under the stars. That’s why I knew what Mary Oliver was talking about when I read “Sleeping in the Forest.” When I go camping, I have some of the same feelings and experiences as the speaker in the poem, even though I don’t talk about them in the same way.

Mary Oliver begins her poem by showing the speaker already on the ground, or earth, in the forest. She writes, “I thought the earth / remembered me, she / took me back so tenderly.” To Oliver, the earth is a woman with “dark skirts” and pockets full of moss and seeds. Using personification, which means giving human qualities to something that isn’t human, Oliver makes the earth seem like an old friend. When I sleep out on the ground, it sometimes feels as if I belong there. Familiar and soft, the earth does feel like a friend.

The speaker says that while sleeping in the forest, there is “nothing / between me and the white fire of the stars / but my thoughts.” That’s how it is when I’m out in the wilderness. I can think better because there are no interruptions from other people and no music or TVs. The speaker uses the simile “light as moths” to show how thoughts float away. This tells exactly how my own thoughts seem to float away or take off into the air because I feel so calm and peaceful.
Another great thing about camping is how quiet it is. In the poem, the speaker hears "the small kingdoms breathing / around me." I believe the speaker is describing all of the new worlds that a camper experiences. Campers hear the little sounds that are hard to hear indoors, such as rustling leaves and hooting owls—"the birds / who do their work in the darkness."

In the last lines of the poem, I think the speaker is talking about dreams or a really deep, great sleep. The poem mentions vanishing "into something better." Maybe the "something better" is a good dream. When I'm camping, I think I sleep more deeply in the fresh air. In the morning, I remember many dreams. Sleeping in the forest is like vanishing into a better place.

I believe that people who don't like camping should read this poem. It can help them understand what it feels like to be outside in nature at night. The poem might even convince some people to go camping. Then maybe they could also sleep "as never before," as Oliver says, and get rid of their worries for a little while. Maybe they could even vanish "into something better."
Part 2: Apply the Writing Process

### PREWRITING

**What Should I Do?**

1. **Create a reading log.**
   Make a two-column chart. On one side, list words and phrases from the work that caught your attention. On the other side, write your reactions, comments, or questions. When you are finished, circle the responses that seem most important to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words/Phrases</th>
<th>My Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;she / took me back&quot;</td>
<td>I belong there. The earth is like a friend that takes me back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleep like &quot;a stone&quot;</td>
<td>When I go camping, I sleep really well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;floated / light as moths&quot;</td>
<td>What does this mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;something better&quot;</td>
<td>Sleep is different outside it's better &amp; deeper, &amp; I have good dreams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Write down your overall response.**
   Use your circled comments and questions to develop a sentence or two that explains how the work made you feel and why it made you feel that way.

   **TIP** Your response statement doesn’t have to be perfect. You can change it when you draft and revise.

   **Working Response:**
   I know what Mary Oliver is saying in her poem because I know what it’s like to sleep on the ground and dream.

3. **Look for more support.**
   Find more words and phrases that affected your response. Examine the poem for images that helped you see or hear what the poet is describing, unusual word choices, or phrases that made you smile or wonder.

   **Images:**
   "nothing / between me and the white fire of the stars / but my thoughts": It’s so quiet in the forest—no TVs, no music.
   "small kingdoms": I hear the insects and little animals, and I know there are other worlds out there.
## Drafting

### What Should I Do?

1. **Develop an informal outline.**
   Making an outline can help you organize your ideas. This writer organized her response from the beginning to the end of the poem. You can organize your response from the most important idea to the least important idea. You can also briefly summarize the work and then explain your reaction to it.

2. **Make a fresh beginning!**
   Draw your reader in by starting out with a surprising or dramatic statement, an interesting or startling fact, a little bit of humor, or a question.

3. **Clearly explain your response.**
   Don't just say, "I liked this" or "I liked that." Explain your responses. The writer of this essay described the memories the poem triggered in her.

### What Does It Look Like?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>A. The earth &quot;took me back so tenderly.&quot; B. The earth seems like an old friend to me, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-11</td>
<td>A. The speaker describes &quot;the white fire of the stars.&quot; B. I think the wilderness is calm, peaceful, and beautiful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>A. The speaker hears &quot;small kingdoms breathing.&quot; B. I hear sounds of nature when camping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>A. The speaker vanishes &quot;into something better.&quot; B. I can sleep well in the fresh air.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A dramatic statement**
Some people can't live for even a single night without the Internet or TV. Camping is definitely not for them.

**A question**
Have you ever slept under the stars?

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**TIP** Before you revise, look back at the key traits on page 608 and at the rubric and peer-reader questions on page 614.
## REVISING AND EDITING

### What Should I Do?
1. **Be sure to give enough information.**
   - Can your reader understand your reaction to the work? Ask a peer reader to **underline** parts of your response that lack background information.
   - Add **details and quotations** that tell about the work.

   See page 614: Ask a Peer Reader

2. **Be precise: use literary terms.**
   - **Circle** literary terms, such as personification, simile, and speaker.
   - If you have few or no circles, revise to make your response **more specific**.

3. **Use different sentence beginnings.**
   - Draw a **box** around words you have repeated at the beginnings of sentences.
   - Combine, break up, or rewrite these sentences to **change the way they start**.

4. **Show how your response is organized.**
   - **Highlight** transitional words, phrases, or sentences in your response.
   - If you have few or no highlights, add **transitions**. These help your reader by specifying which part of the poem you are discussing or by explaining that you are introducing a new idea.

### What Does It Look Like?

- **"the breathing around me."**
  The speaker hears small kingdoms, I believe the all of the speaker is describing new worlds, that a camper experiences. Campers hear the little sounds that are hard to hear indoors, such as rustling leaves and hooting owls.

- **Using personification, which means giving human qualities to something that isn't human, Oliver makes the earth seem
the earth seems like an old friend.**

- **‘In I think the speaker is talking
take about dreams or a really deep, great sleep.
The poem mentions
I think that’s what vanishing “into something
Maybe the
to good dream.”**

- **begins her poem by showing
Mary Oliver shows the speaker already on the ground .
Tells which part of the poem
Another great thing about
camping is how quiet it is. In the poem, the speaker hears .
Introduces new idea**
Preparing to Publish

Personal Response to a Poem

Apply the Rubric

A strong personal response to a poem . . .
- begins by stating the title, the author, and an overall response
- contains enough background information for the reader to follow the response
- has an honest and consistent tone
- is clearly organized and includes transitions
- quotes words and phrases from the poem and fully explains the writer's reaction to them
- includes literary terms to describe the work
- varies sentence beginnings to make ideas flow smoothly
- has a conclusion that summarizes the response

Ask a Peer Reader

- Do parts of my response need more background information?
- How could I make my overall response to the poem clearer?
- Where do I need more quotations?

Check Your Grammar

- Avoid dangling modifiers. Make sure that every modifier you use relates to a word in the sentence.

This phrase dangles. The sentence is missing the word that the phrase should modify.

Using personification, the earth seems like an old friend.

This sentence tells who is using personification.

Using personification, Oliver makes the earth seem like an old friend.

See page R59: Dangling Modifiers

- Correct fragments—groups of words that are punctuated like sentences but are missing a subject, are missing a predicate, or fail to express complete thought.

A familiar feeling, like an old friend.
It feels familiar, like an old friend.

See page R64: Correcting Fragments

Writing Online

For publishing options, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.

Assessment Preparation

For writing and grammar assessment practice, go to the Assessment Center at ClassZone.com.