

Purpose of the Assignment

For the past few days we have been reading and analyzing John Berryman's "Sole Watchman." At this point, we should all have a fairly good idea of what is necessary for a quality interpretation of a poem. The purpose of this assignment is to interpret a poem in an argumentative essay.

Summary of the Assignment

Each student must write a three- to four-page analysis of Berryman's "The Ball Poem." Students have the additional option of finding common ground in more than one poem and exploring the similarities and differences, although that must be cleared with the instructor prior to completing the essay packet and essay. In this essay, students will

- 1) Create a thesis statement that, when developed, brings a deeper and more substantial interpretation of Berryman's poem than a simple reading of the work would;
- 2) Support that thesis statement with evidence from the text;
- 3) Use proper organization and mechanics to clarify your point and support your ideas.

Students should also use proper in-text citations and complete their essays with a Works Cited page.

Important Items to Remember

- Hand this assignment in on time. It is due on _____.
- Ask ahead of time for help if needed.
- Take advantage of the class time given.
- Read the text closely, and follow the steps that were taken with "Sole Watchman."

Berryman Essay Packet

Step 1: Summarize

What is going on in the poem? What is he talking about? What does each sentence say? This is what is needed for this section. Summarize each **sentence** (not each line) in the poem to get a better picture of what is going on. Write that below.

1. Address to God, begging for control of lust
2. Sustain (give strength to) the author's goals
3. Keep me under control until I achieve my career goals
4. Give me a positive way to relieve my stress
5. Keep whiskey (or all alcohol) away from me
6. Give me total commitment toward you
7. Help me to face death calmly
8. Repenting of hurting his daughter
9. Forgive me
10. Help me find peace through unity of spirit

Step 2: Defining Words

What words in this poem jump out? What are the most important words in the text, and why? Select the ones that jump out to the most, and then attempt to explain why they jumped out like they did.

Word	Explanation
Fill	Unclear who is doing the filling
Careful	Why a careful view? Does he mean retrospective, long term view?
Make	This is also an unclear verb

Step 3: The Unexpected

What unusual phrasing or word choice was there in the poem? Write them below. Explaining them is not necessary: they simply need to be in one spot for thesis writing.

Wide and single stars after flying stars

Fill

Make

Step 4: Making Meaning

A valuable interpretation allows the reader to understand a poem in a deeper, more complex way than the poem itself would allow upon first reading. What angle can be taken, what idea can be there that will allow the reader to look at the poem in a new and more meaningful way? Using the poem's summary, word choice, and the unexpected found in the previous steps, select something to focus on.

The unclear words and imperative structures all relate if the confidence of Berryman is called into question. The vice behind all of his vices is a lack of self-confidence.

Step 5: Building a Thesis

A thesis is like all other sentences: it has a subject and a predicate. The subject should be the item that jumps out in the poem, and the predicate should explain how that item allows for a deeper understanding of the text.

Berryman's true vice in "Sole Watchman" is a lack of self-confidence.

Step 6: Supporting the Thesis

Now that a thesis has been written out, explain *why that thesis is meaningful*. What evidence is there in the text to support that thesis? Write down direct quotes and explanations of those quotes and how they tie into the thesis (this is of particular importance for single words).

The evidence is prevalent throughout the text. Berryman, who struggled with alcohol, takes a common aspect of religion—asking a higher power for help—and goes a step further. He asks God not just to “guard” and “teach” him, but to “empty” his heart and “achieve” in him patience. There is no sense of self in the poem because he lacks the confidence to have one.

Step 7: The Outline

Write out a full essay outline. Include quotes and explanations of those quotes.

- I. Bio and Background*
 - a. Berryman's credentials*
 - b. Alcoholism*
 - c. Time period*
- II. Overview*
 - a. General idea*
 - b. Key words*
 - i. Make*
 - ii. Fill*
 - iii. Unite*
 - c. Thesis*
- III. Imperative Structures*
 - a. Guard*
 - b. Teach*
 - c. Sustain*
 - d. Make*
 - e. Empty*
 - f. Let*
- IV. Fill*
 - a. Unclear structure*
 - b. Meaning 1*
 - c. Meaning 2*
 - d. Resolution*
- V. Make*
 - a. Unclear structure*
 - b. Meaning 1*
 - c. Meaning 2*
 - d. Resolution*
- VI. Conclusion*