

AP English Literature and Composition
Question 1: Poetry Analysis (2018)
Sample Student Responses

Sample J

[1] The natural surroundings of human beings have often been the subject of introspection on how they relate to human society. However, while many idolize nature for its beauty, others see negative patterns that echo human behavior in the natural world. One such poet is Olive Senior, who exposes his view of plant life as toxic in his poem "Plants." Senior assumes the role of an enlightened intellectual who warns his audience, general mankind, of the insidious behaviors of plants – their widespread and ever-spreading nature, in both political (military) and sexual comparisons to human society. Though his comparisons to easily accessible imaging, Senior's claim becomes more effective to the general audience he seeks.

[2] Throughout the poem, Senior has comparisons of plant life to military terms and strategies, suggesting their reproduction is like an invasion that should be repulsed. Martial metaphors abound in the poem, all of which Senior points out using his superior, inside knowledge as insidious, heightening the audience's fear of being conquered. "Perhaps you've regarded, / as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove / on the march" (9-11), Senior notes, commencing his invading army imagery. He elaborates further in the following stanzas with word such as "conquest," "invasive," "explosive," "capsules," "colonizing" and "parochuting" (13-20). The close juxtaposition of those words with benignant connotations aid the mood of the audience as a people about to be overwhelmed. This is a clear use of pathos, instilling emotions in an audience, to hold their control and persuade them, establishing Senior still with the narrative power and persuasive hold over the audience he is attempting enlighten. Deepening the audience's fear of the plant life, Senior includes references to espionage, opening the poem with "Plants are deceptive" (1) and elaborating with a metaphorical comparison of flowers to special agents. As flowers are something often enjoyed, this apparent deception makes the audience more paranoid that these sinister, "imperialistic" (9) ambitions of plants are present where humans previously found enjoyment. This distrust established between humans and their surroundings, Senior has prepared his audience for his ultimate goal, to make them contemplate what such imperialistic designs could be hiding in human society.

[3] Another weapon in Senior's arsenal is his general structure and syntax throughout the poem. Increasingly, Senior turns to enjambments, sometimes even overflowing stanzas, such as in "imperialistic/ grand design" (8-9). This flow mimics the imagery of overflowing conquest and invading armies to overwhelm the reader, alas supporting the pathos of fear. These enjambments, however, are still confined within a 4-line stanza structure that remains [ILLEGIBLE]-able throughout the poem. This structure represents the normal, day-to-day structure of society beneath which the demons of conquest hide; thus, Senior extends the impact of his paranoia. Also, common in Senior's sentence structure are informal addresses and questions as are especially evident when Senior calls the reader out for trusting flowers – "don't deny it, my dear, I've seen you / sniff and exclaim" (25-26). Here, Senior refers to his reader in a condescending and informal way, almost like a parent speaking to a child ("my

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dear"). This established position of power in a benevolent-seeming way. Also to hold his general audience's attention, Senior's colloquial language and direct addresses help broaden his appeal and the accessibility as a speaker. Therefore, his audience is more likely to hear his pleas.

[4] Finally, Senior evokes a final emotion – that of shame – to persuade his audience by using language with sexual connotations. "Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!) / and twine" (5-6) suggests that flowers and plants, in their conquest, are also animalistic in their rapid reproduction in a shameful manner. Indeed, Senior adds (excuse me!) to heighten the shame of referring to sex and reproduction, making his audience even less inclined to behave themselves in the manner of the plants.

[5] Finally having established himself as a credible, benevolent speaker showing his unenlightened audience the dangers of plants, Senior concluded by stating the plants will "always outlast us, they were always there" (33), implying the moral deficiencies of imperialistic reproduction of the plants, and by extension, society, are minute traits that will always be there. Therefore, as Senior's fear – inducing phrases such as "one step ahead of us" simply, humans must always be on alert.

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Sample I

[1] Nature has been & will continue to be in existence for millions of years; it is one of the few constants in the history of our Earth. In his 2005 poem "Plants," poet Olive Senior attempts to create a discussion regarding the perpetuity of plant life & the relationship it shares with those around it. Senior establishes said relationship with poetic devices such as syntax, diction, figurative language, & more.

[2] Senior initiates the conversation with an analysis of the true nature of Flora. Senior claims that himself as well as the audience, the human race, must make the inference that a plant's "grand design" is one that is "sinister & imperialistic" based on the manner in which they breed & spread. The use of the words with inherently negative connotations in discussing the goals of plants allows the audience to infer only negative intention on the part of the plant. From lines 13-16, Senior creates a comparison of the plants to invaders & conquistadors through the personification of the shoots as being "bent on conquest" & the seedlings as "invasive." The author also compels his audience to only examine the nature surrounding them by inquiring as to whether they've regarded the mechanisms of the plant life owned them through the uses of a rhetorical question. By soliciting an answer from his audience, Senior implores them to truly take the malevolent nature of nature into consideration.

[3] Starting in Line 17, Senior concedes that his audience may have not payed much regarding to what may seem to be the minute of mechanisms through which plants enact their "colonizing ambitions." Following said concession, Senior creates a list of aforementioned mechanisms in order to finally have attention drown to them. Senior then shifts to a discussion regarding "those special agents called flowers" (line 22) in which he delves into the flower's tricks for seducing. Senior remarks that flowers are specifically made for romancing creatures, & includes "even you" to signify to the audience that they are not an exception when it comes to falling for the flower's tricks. The author states that he has witnessed people fall prey to the enticing elements of the flower & seeks to remind he who he refers to as "Innocent" through apostrophe that those elements of a flower to which he is attracted are solely created in the pursuance of the seduction of more innocents into spreading their progeny. Plants have induced the development of a "cosmic program" that enables them to perpetuate themselves as generation of humans die & become "plant food," signifying superiority of flora in relation to humans & our lack of ability to break the cycle in which we are trapped.

[4] Lines 1-4 & 33-36 serve as an initiation & a conclusion to the piece. The poem begins with a broad statement referring to plants a being deceptive & as knowing their places & concludes with an analysis of the plants inevitable infiniteness due to their being "always there one step ahead of us." Senior seeks to establish the power held over us by plant life & their nature as stagnant & constant in the lives of those around them & in the history of the Earth. Senior concludes the poem by simply referring to plants as "weed," finalizing the negative

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relationship that had previously been established between plants and humans through the use of a word with a strongly negative connotation.

[5] Nature has proved to us time & time again that it will always be there as we pass from generation to generation. Olive Senior provides his audience with a thorough analysis of this stagnancy through his poems his apt selection of literary devices. Plants are simply (masters of the) devices of seduction & invasion & colonization which go unnoticed by humans, which is why they have managed to outlast us & been witness to our faults over the centuries.

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Sample H

[1] Olive Senior's poem "Plants" describes the organisms that are all around us as sentient beings with nefarious motivations. While seemingly a humorous piece, the poem contributes to a larger cautionary tale of social upheaval. Through his use of a sinister tone to convey the gravity of the situation and figurative language likening plants to humans, Senior warns the reader to be wary of those that seem harmless.

[2] Senior's use of a sinister tone throughout the piece, even when describing plants, emphasizes the didactic nature of his words. By portraying plants as scary, the author is able to open the mind of the reader to a new perspective in which the seemingly-harmless are actually dangerous. The very first sentence of the poem begins with deception, establishing a direct statement about the nature and attitude towards plants from the start. By beginning his poem on a sinister; yet somewhat ridiculous note, Senior sets up the rest of his poem to comment on what plants represent, portrayed in a negative light. He is enabled to use plants and their "deceptive" nature as a metaphor for humans. The dark tone continues even in the most innocent of plant functions, breeding, as the author states, "we must infer a sinister not to say imperialistic grand design." The ridiculously-serious tone when describing what the reader perceives as harmless serve to make the reader aware of a greater message, and to not take the poem literally in its commentary on plants, but rather to search for a greater meaning. Indeed, the speaker directly addresses the reader, saying "maybe you haven't quite taken in the colonizing ambitions" of plants and "don't deny it, my dear, I've seen you" smell flowers. This direct comment to the reader calls the reader to notice his or her own lack of suspicion towards plants. The speaker even calls the reader "Innocent" for not suspecting those who appear "beneath your notice." By implementing a sinister tone and addressing the audience directly, Senior alerts the reader to a greater critique on the lack of social awareness prevalent in society.

[3] Senior also utilizes figurative language to describe plants as having nefarious purposes in order to characterize them as an unnoticed threat. Senior personifies the plants as having "colonizing ambitions" and as being that are "bent on conquest." This personification causes the reader to understand that the speaker is truly speaking about people, and is simply using plant life as a metaphor. He uses metaphors of weaponry, of "explosive dispersal in capsules and seed cases" and "armies of mangrove" to represent guns and warfare that is the intrinsic nature of plants. He likens flowers to an "instrument to seduce you into scattering plant progeny" and "special agents." This comparison warns the reader that even the most innocent-looking being, a flower, plots to overthrow people until "we become plant food." The transformation of plants into sentient, violently-motivated beings draws parallels to repressed, ignored groups of humans. Through his use of figurative language, Senior cautions the reader to be wary of the inconspicuous.

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[4] Plants, everywhere, overlooked, are likened to humans in Senior's poem. He cautions the reader to stay vigilant, because it is their motivation to overthrow humans. Senior's message applies to society as a whole concerning public policy. In order to retain peace, we must recognize the desires of those we deem beneath our notice, lest they overthrow us.

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Sample G

[1] In Olive Senior's "Plants," plant life is characterized as a deceptive, single minded, and ambitious. "Plants" features descriptions of plants that make them seem like they have their own goals and are a force to be reckoned with against humans. The speaker utilizes direct characterization and descriptive imagery of the plant life to warn his or her loved one not to succumb to the deceiving powers of plants, illustrating the man versus nature life struggle encapsulated in "Plants."

[2] The speaker's inclusion of personification of the behavior plants beyond their normal abilities and roles shows that the speaker is wary of plant life and distrusts their existence. The way that the speaker perceives plants, as "armies of mangrove on the march" and "shoots on bent on a conquest" illuminates the fact that the speaker sees plants as more than just harmless flora: The speaker rather feels threatened that the "armies of mangrove" might take over the human world. The indirect characterization of plants as "invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces" also implies that plants want to establish themselves on Earth and not be confined to one area or region, as humans maybe want them to be. The personification of plants as armies and invaders also suggest that the speaker is trying to warn his audience that plants are evil. Their audience may be unaware of the supposed militaristic qualities of plants, otherwise the speaker may not feel the need to divulge in them. Inclusion of warlike words – "colonizing", "explosive", "armies", and "conquest" – further establish the speaker's distrust of plant life.

[3] In addition to the speaker's personification of plants as warlike beings, the speaker utilizes descriptive imagery to warn their audience, supposedly a loved one, of the deceptive nature of plants. The speaker quickly establishes to "[his] dear" that the inconspicuously dressed, perfumed" plants are using their sweet appearances to "seduce [people]" into dispersing their seeds and multiplying their population. Inclusion of the description of seeds as "sweet fruit" ... "made up for romancing" suggests that the speaker has a very distrustful view of the façade plants put up. The speaker tells his "innocent" audience of the real agenda of plants presumably because he is trying to prevent his audience from becoming victims to the "vast cosmic program" plants have underway.

[4] The speaker in Olive Senior's "Plants" makes it clear from the very first line that he believes "plants are deceptive." A general distrust of the appearance of plants culminates into the speaker boldly asserting to his audience that plants will "outlast us" and will ultimately be victors over humans. "Plants" explores the man versus flora relationship that the speaker seems to have with plants through the speaker's hyperbolic personifications of plants and beautiful descriptions of their deceiving looks. The speaker's ultimate goal appears to be furrowing a protective wedge of knowledge of plants' deceptive nature between his audience and plants, revealing that man and nature may have irrepressible, mutual distrustful, antagonistic feelings against one another.

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Sample F

[1] In Olive Senior's 2005 poem "Plants," Senior effectively portrays a unique relationship between humans and plants in which plants have formed a hierarchy over humankind. Senior effectively portrays his ideas through a combined use of imagery and metaphor.

[2] To begin, Senior introduces that plants as a "deceptive" group. Senior capitalizes on the idea that a plant may seem rooted and as if it may never have the desire to spread or "breed" like a human. However, in order to introduce the exponentially-growing plant kingdom's nature, Senior uses a series of words that convey a deeper meaning Senior says, "armies of Mangrove on the march, roots in the air, clinging tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere" are all appearing before our very eyes and we do not even notice them. Through this effective use of imagery, Senior is able to introduce the idea that plants are forming, or have had, a superior status to humans. Senior is conveying the message that plants will continue to grow and humans can do nothing about it. Plants are conveyed as having a superior "mindset" than humans and are also portrayed as doing more than humans are aware of.

[3] Senior adds to the idea that plants are superior to humankind by giving examples of how plants are slowly but surely being incorporated into our lives more and more. Senior uses the metaphor of flowers being mere "special agents" used for romancing "insects, bats, birds, bees, and even you." Senior compares flower to special agents in order to convey the message that they are capable of changing your mood and are used to make one feel romance. Senior adds to the extended metaphor by alluding to the idea the "berry" is nothing but "an ovary" used to seduce humans. Senior's metaphors provide as examples that support his overall idea that plants are superior and have formed a hierarchy over humans.

[4] Senior's portrayal of the relationship between plants and humans is unique and very specific. However, through his strategic use of imagery and metaphor, Senior is able to effectively portray his idea that plants have has, do have, and will continue to have a hierarchy formed over humankind.

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Sample E

[1] In the poem, Olive Senior personifies plants to portray the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and the plant life. The speaker of the poem is Senior, while the intended audience is the reader. By demonstrating many similarities between plants and humans, the speaker demonstrated the deception that is present in everyday life. By using the literary techniques of syntax, diction, and figurative language, the poet intends to connect humans with nature.

[2] The use of syntax is significant because it provides a connection between plant life and human life. The poem contains nine stanzas that each have 4 lines. The separation of the stanzas is symbolic of the different stages of life. Just like life, the content of the next stanza is differing from the previous one. As the poem progresses, the poet models a relationship between the implied audience and plants by discussing mature content. In the beginning, the poet uses short, simple sentences to highlight the simplicity of life at birth. As the poem progresses, the poet models a relationship between the implied audience and plants by discussing mature content. In the beginning, the poet uses short, simple sentences to highlight the simplicity of life at birth. As the poem is read, the sentences become more and more complex and elongated to portray the difficulties and trials of life.

[3] By using a sophisticated diction, the poet demonstrates the serious connections that can be made between plants and humans. By using words like “profligate, extravagant, reckless,” and “improvident” the poet simplifies the complex relationship humans have with plants by relating a similarity of characteristics. The diction of the poem portrays and relates a sense of respect for the existence of plants. Just like the speaker, and audience, plants also fulfill a purpose on earth. In similarity to humans, plants were specifically and uniquely created to have a specific function.

[4] Lastly, the poet uses figurative language to connect plant life to human experience and emotion. Throughout the course of the poem, Senior uses personification to give plants human-like qualities. In the first stanza, plants are personified as having the human ability to run. The poet is trying to demonstrate that humans are never satisfied. The poet compared flowers to being an instrument of seductive power. Often times, humans associate sexual desires with plants. Flowers present beauty and are often used to express emotion.

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Sample D

[1] Oliver Senior's poem, *Plants*, discusses the importance that plants play in the lives of animals. In his work, Senior is addressing plants towards humans and their behavior through the narrator.

[2] The speaker who is undoubtedly a human, seems as though he is a plant. His speech addresses humans as unaware of plants capabilities. The speaker indirectly states that plants are for more intelligent and superior to humans as "they'll outlast us, they were always there one step ahead of us" (Senior 33) The speaker's diction allows humans to see what plants are capable of doing. The author gives these plants traits to make them appear aware of what humans do to them. "Plants are deceptive...And what about those special agents called flowers" (Senior 1, 21) As though they work for a government agency like the CIA, plants are intelligent and act as a high figure that is lacked in respect. "The world is free of shoots bent on conquest invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces" (Senior 14) The comparison between plants and humans is unbalanced, where the humans dominate at the top of the food chain. The speaker believes that the current complex relationship between humans and plants should be changed to prevent plant life from dominating humans.

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Sample C

[1] In Olive Senior's poem "Plants," he compares plants to many life situations among telling the story about what plants do. He goes through each stanza giving a comparison to everyday life and what humans actually see.

[2] Through the first Stanza (lines 1-4) "Plants... traces," he is comparing plants to humans. Discussing how they can trick you and they may root in one place however like humans that is subject to change.

[3] Continuing through the poem the author begins to give real life characteristics to the plant. He conveys this message through words such as "mangrove on the march" in (line 10-11), and "hitchhiking burrs on your sweater" in (line 18-19). Senior is using personification in this specific scenario.

[4] Rhythmic is another literary element in this passage. In lines 14 and 16, also in lines 34 and 36. Senior uses a rhyme scheme in these two positions of the poem. Senior uses a selective word choice throughout the whole poem. Describing and analyzing scenarios to help the reader visualize his text. Using these action words draw the reader in and help them comprehend the message he is conveying.

[5] Olive Senior conveyed this first message with a very informative text also. He expressed that plants have many similar qualities comparing towards humans and life.

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Sample B

[1] Olive Senior has a distinct way of writing poems. Seniors structure of his poems are not commonly seen in the poetry world and his diction is straight forward.

[2] The poem "plants" has stanzas where each one picks up from the previous one. the beginning of each stanza finishes the previous of the last ones. The authors technique of setting his poem like this makes it more powerful for the diction. Senior talks to the readers directly by saying "...you."