

## Example of Student Writing – Exceeding College Ready

In D.C Berry's work "On Reading Poems to a Senior Class at South High" the author illustrates the struggle between a teacher and senior students with individual ideas as they try to come together in an English class discussion. In references to the typical behaviors of students in their senior year, the teacher realizes that while students may be different from him outside of the school, he also finds they share some similar ideas when paying attention to what they try to say in classroom discussions. The audience sees a metaphoric comparison between two worlds: a normal English classroom and an aquarium full of fish ready to journey on to other places. Using different literary devices such as similes, metaphors and imagery, Berry attempts to show the audience that the two worlds of a student and a teacher may collide in a way that produces a new world for them to explore before they venture on again in separate ways.

Berry begins the poem with a stoic tone and a simile describing the students' boredom, "I noticed them sitting there as orderly as frozen fish in a package." He demonstrates through this simile the discomfort the teacher feels as he tries to engage his students in the discussion. It is not until the teacher really begins to listen to them that he finds their setting transformed from a boring classroom into a vibrant aquarium. The students, once bored and dull in the classroom, are now interested in what the teacher has to say and even willing to share their own ideas. In another simile, Berry remarks that the students, who the teacher now sees as fish, opened up to him and allowed him to become a fish like them, "with my words, that they had only opened up like gills for them, and let me in." (Line 13-16) Symbolically, Berry may be saying to any teacher reading this poem that an easy way to connect to students is to really listen to their ideas. being fish in a vibrant aquarium.

Berry uses strong verbs throughout the poem, such as in Line 18, "like thirty tails

**Comment [1]:** This student introduces the poem with the author's name, the title of the poem, and a brief summary of the aim of the poem. This is a solid introductory sentence for the paper. The student continues to situate the poem for the reader throughout the introduction. This student also shows mastery of grammar and mechanics.

**Comment [2]:** The student incorporates quotes from the text and elaborates on their meanings. The student also includes in-text citation from the poem.

whacking words.” The “tails whacking” are the excited students discussing their ideas and thoughts on the poems being read by the teacher. Also, in lines 20 through 22, Berry describes the school bell that signals the end of class as “punching a hole in the door where we all leaked out.” The use of these verbs allows the reader to see the vivid distinction between lively fish in an aquarium and a classroom of exiting students in a normal high school.

Toward the end of the poem, instead of the students and teacher going back to their normal selves once the bell rang, the teacher was still in the trance of the discussion that took place in the recent class period. Since the narrator is the teacher, the only conclusion that can be made from the teacher still being in the trance is that he is pleased about the discussion. In lines 23 through 28, Berry writes, “They went to another class I suppose and I home where Queen Elizabeth my cat met me and licked my fins till they were hands again,” which shows that the teacher was the last one to transform back to a legitimate human again.

In conclusion, the author uses a metaphor to create the analogy of students and a teacher in a classroom to fish in an aquarium. In his efforts to create a connection between that of a typical classroom and a aquarium full of life, Berry demonstrates the possible relationship a teacher can have with his students and the material they discuss, as well as the reference to the period of life seniors experience before they venture on to become the people they're supposed to be in college and beyond. It can reasonably be assumed from this that Berry would recommend that all teachers seek to engage their students, take them from “frozen fish” to “tails whacking”, for there is only a short amount of time before the aquarium transforms back into a classroom.

**Comment [3]:** In this paragraph, the student attempts a difficult analysis of the author’s word choice. The analysis is strong and is supported by quotes from the text.

**Comment [4]:** The student provides a clear and succinct conclusion to the piece. The student restates the purpose of the poem and reflects on how the poem has meaning and relevance in the student’s life.

## Assessment

### **Strengths**

This essay is well structured with a clear introduction that includes a thesis statement, several supporting paragraphs that include quotes from the text and elaboration, and a formal conclusion that reflects on the importance of the poem. The student also shows a mastery of grammar and mechanics. The sentence structure is sound and word choice is good.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

There is no such thing as a “perfect” writing piece. All papers, regardless of grade level, will have room for improvement. For instance, this student might work on including a transition between the paragraph that discusses verb choice and the paragraph that addresses the end of the poem.

### **Overall**

This essay is **Exceeding College Ready** because it competently addresses each of the skills in the scoring guide (taken from the College and Career Readiness Standards) in ways that create a piece that is both interesting and pleasing to read. As many instructors know, it is possible to write a paper that is competent but not at all interesting. For example, this essay cites “valid examples or illustrations that support” the students conclusions (one of the performance indicators for Reasoning) and does so clearly and with good word choice.

The Scoring Sheet that accompanies this CRA is designed to assess the student’s performance throughout the CRA, so here are some example skills and scores based only on this final essay:

<b>Exceeding College Ready (4):</b> Substantially exceeds the performance expectations <b>College Ready (3):</b> Shows proficiency in all of the performance expectations <b>Approaching College Ready (2):</b> Meets only some of the performance expectations <b>Initiating College Ready (1):</b> Does not yet meet the performance expectations
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KEY COGNITIVE SKILLS	Instructor's Score
<b>Intellectual Curiosity</b> (engages in scholarly inquiry)	<b>4</b>
<b>Reasoning</b> (considers arguments and conclusions of self and others)	<b>4</b>
FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	Instructor's Score
<b>Writing Across the Curriculum</b> (writes clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions; composes and revises drafts)	<b>3</b>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS	Instructor's Score
<b>Writing</b> (develops effective rhetorical techniques; generates ideas and gathers information relevant to the topic and purpose; evaluates relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of sources; formulates a thesis; composes drafts to refine key ideas, organize them more logically, fluidly; uses language precisely and effectively; edits writing for proper voice, tense, syntax)	<b>3</b>