



EXAMPLE THINK PIECE—ON “MY PAPA’S WALTZ”

Description of Part of Think Piece	Example Text
Part I: Summary of the Text Include: 1) title; 2) expression of the main idea (what it is about); 3) what kind of text it is? Principle formal features, class, genre?; 3) summary of what happens in the text.	“My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke This poem is about a child’s memory of waltzing with his or her father. The father is drunk, and after some out of control dancing, the father takes the child to bed. –25-50 words (this is 32 words)
Part II: Identify an Issue or Question Focus on one (perhaps two) key “felt difficulties” (questions or issues) that you have reading and understanding the text.	A key question about this poem is whether it is a warm, happy memory of this father or a picture of abuse.
Part III: Clarify the Issue/Question What is the nature of this question? What is at stake? Where does it come from? How does it relate to other things in the story? What is its relative importance to the text?	The question is really one of tone and how we are to interpret certain words, occurrences, and facts communicated about the father and this dance. These features of the poem could have innocent meanings or darker more dangerous ones.
Part IV: Identify Multiple Suggestions or Theories of Meaning Identify at least two different possible interpretations that seem to reasonably explain or help you understand this issue or question you have about the text.	The key question of this poem has three possible readings: the happy memory reading, the bittersweet reading, and the abuse reading.
Part V: Test/Evaluate the Varying Suggestions or Interpretations “Reason” out the “bearings” of each suggestion (as Dewey says) through close observation of evidence for that interpretation in the text and the interpretation of the validity or plausibility of this evidence.	In the happy reading, the scene is of some rough, but fun dancing. They “romp” with such gusto that they are knocking things over, and though he is tripping and missing his step and making his mother “frown,” the child still hangs on and as he’s getting danced off to bed he “clings” to his father’s shirt. It even seems that his father is clowning around a bit as is indicated by the fact that he “beat[s] time on his head. Calling his father “Papa” in the title also indicates a sense of affection for this father figure. The bittersweet reading sees the poem through the lens of the drunkenness (and possible alcoholism) of the father. In this reading, the young child may have enjoyed this bit of wild play (as little kids do), but as we look closely at the father with his drunkenness, his signs of a rough life from his injured knuckle (perhaps from a fight) and his rough hands (perhaps from hard labor), we see this man as troubled and having a hard life—and that is bittersweet. The third reading sees this poem as a metaphor, if not a realistic account, of abuse. The poem is full of dark, violent words: hung on like death, not easy, unfrown, battered, beat. The waltz could be a metaphor for the abuse that this alcoholic man inflicts on this family and child. The dizziness of this whiskey induced problem is the representation of the difficulty this child has dealing with this father who he loves yet who also abuses him and his mother. The romp of the dance could be a literal brawl rather than out of control roughhousing and the hand beating time could represent actual beatings.
Part VI: Accepting/Rejecting Different Interpretations—Finding What is Most Plausible State what you consider—based from your testing and evaluating of the different interpretations—which one seems most reasonable and plausible to you.	Although all three readings are possible, I think the bittersweet reading is the more plausible. Though this might have been a happy memory of a raucous moment of horseplay before bed with a father this child loved, this man’s drunkenness is disturbing and nothing to be happy about.

Example Think Piece in “Turn In” Format

Name (Lennie Irvin)

Class-section (Engl1302.163)

Date (1/26/11)

“My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke

This poem is about a child’s memory of waltzing with his or her father. The father is drunk, and after some out of control dancing, the father takes the child to bed. A key question about this poem is whether it is a warm, happy memory of this father or a picture of abuse. The question is really one of tone and how we are to interpret certain words, occurrences, and facts communicated about the father and this dance. These features of the poem could have innocent meanings or darker more dangerous ones.

The key question of this poem has three possible readings: the happy memory reading, the bittersweet reading, and the abuse reading. In the happy reading, the scene is of some rough, but fun dancing. They “romp” with such gusto that they are knocking things over, and though he is tripping and missing his step and making his mother “frown,” the child still hangs on and as he’s getting danced off to bed he “clings” to his father’s shirt. It even seems that his father is clowning around a bit as is indicated by the fact that he “beat[s] time on his head. Calling his father “Papa” in the title also indicates a sense of affection for this father figure. The bittersweet reading sees the poem through the lens of the drunkenness (and possible alcoholism) of the father. In this reading, the young child may have enjoyed this bit of wild play (as little kids do), but as we look closely at the father with his drunkenness, his signs of a rough life from his injured knuckle (perhaps from a fight) and his rough hands (perhaps from hard labor), we see this man as troubled and having a hard life—and that is bittersweet. The third reading sees this poem as a metaphor, if not a realistic account, of abuse. The poem is full of dark, violent words: hung on like death, not easy, unfrown, battered, beat. The waltz could be a metaphor for the abuse that this alcoholic man inflicts on this family and child. The dizziness of this whiskey induced problem is the representation of the difficulty this child has dealing with this father who he loves yet who also abuses him and his mother. The romp of the dance could be a literal brawl rather than out of control roughhousing and the hand beating time could represent actual beatings. I believe all three readings are plausible, though for me the abuse reading necessitates the reader to see the entire poem as a metaphor.

Although all three readings are possible, I think the bittersweet reading is the more plausible. Though this might have been a happy memory of a raucous moment of horseplay before bed with a father this child loved, this man’s drunkenness is disturbing and nothing to be happy about.

--482 words (should be 250-500 words)