

Personal Response, Introduction  
English 30-1

The personal response is your opportunity to respond to a text or texts given. It is often less formal in nature and can assume a variety of forms. The question asks for your response rather than the author's intent.

Question form:

What do these texts suggest to you about theme and qualifier(shaper).

A sample question question:

What do these texts suggest to you about how a new perspective influences an individual's interpretation of the world? Support your idea(s) with reference to one or more of the texts presented and to your previous knowledge or experience.

Texts that were used: Poem, fiction excerpt, 2 visuals

Texts that may be used:	Forms that your response can take:
Poem Excerpt from a short story Newspaper article Picture (visual) Non-fiction essay Brochure	essay – personal or critical reflection – narrative – short story, 'in character' script rant diary entry speech (or anything else you might care to concoct)

This is about encountering new texts, interpreting them, relating them to your own experience of the world and choosing a way to express your ideas. This assignment is about tone and style(1/2) and quality of ideas (1/2).

---

The poem "Horses" conveys the impact of a simple experience that made a profound and lasting impression on the speaker.

What does the text convey to you about the effect of simple but significant experiences in people's lives? Refer to specific detail from the poem and to your previous knowledge or experience?

## Instructions

1. Read “Horses” carefully and thoughtfully before you start the writing assignments.
2. Read **both** assignments before you start writing.

### HORSES

It was from a window I first saw the horses.

It was winter in Berlin: a light  
with no light, a sky without sky.

---

The air white as a loaf of wet bread.

And there, by the window, bitten off  
by the teeth of the winter, a deserted arena.

Then, all of a sudden, ten horses  
led by a man, moved into the snow.

Their passing left hardly a ripple, like fire,  
but they filled a whole universe  
void to my eyes, until then. Ablaze  
with perfection, they moved like ten gods, colossal  
and grand in the hoof, with dreamy and elegant manes.

Their rumps were like planets or oranges.

Their color was honey and amber and fire.

Their necks were like pillars  
carved in the stone of their arrogance,  
and out of vehement eyes their energy  
glared from within like a prisoner.

There, in the silence of midday  
in a soiled and slovenly winter  
the horses' intensity was rhythm  
the blood, the importunate<sup>1</sup> treasure of being.

I looked—looked till my whole force reawakened.  
This was the innocent fountain, the dance in the gold,  
the sky, the fire still alive in the beautiful.

I've forgotten the wintry gloom of Berlin.

I will never forget the light of the horses.

*Pablo Neruda* (1904-1973)  
Chilean poet and diplomat who  
won the Nobel Prize for Literature 1971

<sup>1</sup> importunate-insistent

Many experiences, regardless of their complexity, may have the power to cause a significant impact on the human spirit. These experiences are often unexpected, catching a person off-guard. In the poem, Horses, a man watches as ten horses are led through the snow of a gloomy winter in Berlin. Through the development of imagery and juxtaposition of images in his poem, Pablo Neruda develops the idea that a simple but significant experience has the potential to reawaken a spirit lulled by despair, providing a person with a momentary renewal of life.

---

The horses appear in a scene of absolute gloom, striking the narrator with their passionate being and reawakening his soul. The situation in the poem is terribly smothering with a “light with no light, a sky without sky.” The scene is wholly negative in its very essence. Happiness is not found in a place with “the air as white as a loaf of white bread.” When the horses appear, however, the narrator has a new awareness of “a whole universe void to my eyes, until then.” The horses have an impact upon the narrator that moves him to describe them as “gods, colossal and grand in the hoof.” This simple experience reawakens the life in the narrator, as “the horses’ intensity was rhythm the blood, the importunate treasure of being.” They rejuvenate a spirit in him that had been dulled by the gloom of “a soiled and slovenly winter.” Small events such as this have the power to relieve the monotony of life and renew the glory of living in the minds and spirits of people. “This was the innocent fountain, the dance in the gold, the sky, the fire still alive in the beautiful.” Small but significant experiences in one’s life can affect one’s very zest for living, and their belief in the beauty of life.

The author reinforces the contrasting images of glory and gloom of the horses through juxtaposition and strong imagery. The author begins the poem with a description of the gloomy streets and sky of Berlin in the winter. He develops the image of whiteness and dullness by describing the barren sky and deserted arena “bitten off by the teeth of winter.” Immediately after these images is the description of the horses. In contrast to the scene depicted initially, the horses are described with images of strength, grace, and grandness. “Ablaze with perfection,” and of the colours “honey and amber and fire,” the image of the horses fills the mind of the reader. The reader feels the renewal of spirit with the entrance of the horses and can see their absolute glory filling the sight of the narrator. Such fiery imagery in juxtaposition to the gloom depicted previously clearly develops the feeling of rebirth. The author ends the poem by declaring the lasting impression that the image of the horses had on him. Such small experiences that stand out so clearly against the monotony of daily life will stay with a person for a lifetime.

Neruda claims it is those significant moments that inspire us to continue on in the face of difficult circumstances. Last year my 49 year old father died--suddenly, without warning, "bitten off by the teeth of the winter". In the depths of my grief I found, locked away in a drawer in his study, the letter he wrote to my mother on the occasion of my birth. In that short epistle I found the tender soul that my father had often kept hidden in the day to day bustle of our lives. My spirit, lulled by despair, found surcease.

---

A reawakening of spirit can be caused by a significant, albeit small, experience. The appearance of the horses in the winter of Berlin, the letter in the winter of my grief, are, in many ways are small experiences yet both possessed the power to rejuvenate souls.