

Ninth Grade CSR
Writing Post-assessment
Spring 2001

Writing Situation

Poetry is usually written at various levels of meaning. Poets write a surface message that carries within it a deeper message. This is certainly the case with Steve Lawhead's poem "The Sun Goes Down on Summer." On the face of it, the poem is simply about a boy who wishes summer was not ending. The poet, however, is writing about more than the end of a vacation. As you read "The Sun goes Down on Summer," think about the deeper meaning in the poet's words.

The Sun Goes Down on Summer

Steve Lawhead

I come to the water one last time as the sun goes down on summer.
It's going; I can feel it slip away, and it leaves a cold empty spot,
 a hole in my warm memories of endless golden days
 and dreams as ripe as watermelons.
I'd give the world to make the summer stay.

The water is calm around me.
It's a warm, silent sea of thought dyed in the rich blues of night
 and memory.
Why can't things just stay the way they are?
Instead, the days rush headlong into change,
 and I feel like nothing's ever going to be the same.

Soon school will start again. And all the things I thought I'd left
 behind will come back again, and it won't be gentle water I'll be
 swimming in—
It'll be noise and people and schedules and passes and teachers
 telling everyone what to do.
One more year of homework, tests, and grades. Of daily popularity
 contests and pressure-cooker competition and heaps of frustration.

The first day is the worst. Not knowing who your friends are, or
 what's changed since last year. Trying to pick it up where you
 left off.
I'll look real hard for a last-year's friend to get me from one

scrambled class to another, through halls crawling with people.
I wonder if I'll fit in?

Football practice started last week. It started without me.
I had to make a choice, and football lost.
Two years on the team and it struck me – who am I doing this for?
It's just another thing people expect you to do – things that sap your freedom
and keep you from being yourself.
That's what I want the most, to be myself. But that's hard.

Here's what I dread the most: when summer goes, I go with it.
I go back to school, and I change as soon as I walk through those doors.
I have to be someone everyone will like – that's a law of survival.
What would happen if I just stayed real to me?
Would they turn me off? Label me “weird?”
It seems like so much to risk.
But growing is a risk. Change is a risk.

And who knows, I might discover something of myself
in the coming year.
I might get closer to the person I am – what a discovery that would be!

When the doors open on Monday morning, I'll have a fresh start,
a fresh opportunity to find myself.
I want to be ready.

Writing Task

In a well-organized essay, discuss the poet's message in the poem “The Sun Goes Down on Summer.” Be sure to include a clearly-worded thesis in your introduction. Use concrete details (evidence) from the poem in your essay's body paragraphs, and explain how each concrete detail supports your interpretation. Write an effective conclusion that gives your essay strength and impact.