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American Literature A
Professor Armstrong
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Give the essay a title that states or suggests the specific focus of your essay. Use a two-part structure with general topic and specific focus separated by a colon (:). Put the poem's title in quotation marks.

The Poetry of Everyday Life:

William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just To Say"

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) is one of the most important modernist poets in America, primarily because he focused on American subjects for his writing. Unlike many of the other American modernists such as Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell and T.S. Eliot, Williams did not leave America. He was born, lived, and died in the small-town of New Rutherford, New Jersey, and continued to practice medicine while he was a professional poet. Thus his poems reflect the everyday experience of ordinary people. A good example is "This Is Just To Say," published in 1934. Actually, this poem doesn't seem like a poem at all. It resembles an ordinary note that a husband or wife might leave or which a child might write to his parent. This "found poem" makes us curious about the relationship between the speaker and the person to whom the note is addressed, but more generally it forces us to think about the significance of everyday objects and situations as subjects for poetry.

"This Just to Say" is a 12 line poem. It is divided into three stanzas. There is no regular pattern of stresses in the lines or pattern of rhyme. The poem consist of 2 or maybe 3 sentences but there is no punctuation in the poem. As mentioned before the "poem" is written in simple everyday language as a note to a loved one, the kind of note that would be put on the door of a refrigerator. In fact, the plums were in the icebox (l. 4) and are cold (l. 12), so this note was likely left on the refrigerator door just after the plums were eaten. There are no figures of speech in the poem, and only the last three lines of the poem--"they were

Discuss the formal features of the poem, including things that are absent (here for example, rhyme, figures, etc.)

1. Introduce the poet and select relevant details about his/her life.
2. Introduce the poem and focus on its importance for your essay.
3. End with a clear thesis statement that indicates your interpretation of the poem.

delicious / so sweet / and so cold"--have any special poetic characteristics: a repetition of the adverb "so" and the alliteration of "so sweet" and consonance of "delicious." All of these sounds seem to express the speaker's enjoyment of the sweet, juicy plums.

The title of the poem, which is really part of the note is a typical expression for starting a note by emphasizing the note's simple message and perhaps the haste in which the note was written. 'This is just to say' means, in other words, this is just a simple, quick note to tell you something. But the idea of giving a simple message is somewhat ironic in the sense that such everyday notes or conversations are never so simple. People's everyday communication, especially between husband and wife and parents and children, is always full of other meanings that express their relationship. This poem is no exception. That said, the poem is also quite unclear on many points. Stephen Matterson says that the poem gives "the reader a wide range of possibilities." In fact, the meaning of the poem is so open that the "reader is left free to construct a poem, and the reader becomes the owner of the resulting poem" (Matterson). Indeed, the speaker of the poem is not identified. Is it a man or woman? A husband or wife? The situation is in the home, so possibly it is a message from husband to wife. The speaker could also be a child or young adult, but the voice seems more mature than that of a child or teenager. Even though it has been suggested that the speaker of the poem is a boy (Matterson), I want to discuss the poem as a message between husband and wife and an expression of their relationship.

A critical view can help support your reading of the poem.

Write the author's last name or the name of the web-site as a reference.

Explain the situation in the poem.

In the first stanza the speaker announces that he has eaten the plums in the icebox. In the second stanza, he says he knows that his wife was probably saving them for breakfast. And finally, in the third stanza, he says that he is sorry but the plums were delicious.

Summarize the contents of the poem by stanza.

their relationship is cold? Do he still love her? Perhaps he has been tempted by another woman or maybe he is having an affair with another woman. In any case, it seems that he does not love his wife anymore, and they do not enjoy the intimacy of sex anymore. Thus, "This is Just to Say" is a poem about a husband's possible infidelity or the loss of love and intimacy in a marriage.

Restate the main idea of the essay.

In "This is Just to Say," William Carlos Williams suggests the changing relation between husband and wife through a simple note of apology. Many of the modernist poets tried to represent everyday life of ordinary people in simple language. Imagism was the beginning of this movement in the early twentieth century, and poets such as Amy Lowell believed their role was to find beauty in the modern world. Williams focused on American themes and is famous for the saying "No ideas but in things" (*Poetry Archive*). "This Is Just to Say" is a good example of this interest in everyday life and Williams' interest in things and the ideas and feelings that they can hold.

Put the references in alphabetical (A-Z) order by author's last name or homepage title.

Works Cited

- Matterson, Stephen. "On 'This is Just to Say'" *Modern American Poetry*. Viewed on June 24th <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/williams/just.htm>
- Poetry Archive*. "William Carlos Williams." Viewed on June 24th, 2010 <<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=7349>>
- Williams, William Carlos. "This is Just to Say." *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century, Volume One: Henry Adams to Dorothy Parker*. Eds. Robert Haas et al. New York: The Library of America, 2000, 460.