

Sample Thesis:

Theodor Roethke uses **ambiguity in his diction and tone*** IN ORDER TO suggest that, **abusive or not, many relationships are fraught with emotional complexity****

* identification of literary element

** reader's interpretation of text's theme

Sample Analysis Paragraph:

Roethke uses ambiguous diction primarily in words that are related to the "dancing" in the poem. The title, "My Papa's Waltz," suggests a fast-paced, cheerful dance and sets the reader up with positive expectations for the poem. But some of **Roethke's** diction inside the poem itself implies that the "dance" between the boy and his father may or may not be one of enjoyment. The speaker claims to have "hung on like death" (3) during the dance. He and his father "romped until the pans/slid from the kitchen shelf" (5-6). As a result of the ambiguously violent diction used here, the reader may interpret these lines in numerous ways. The child may be enjoying the time with his father so much that he clings to him out of love, and their tumbling may be so enthusiastic and animated that they make a mess of the kitchen. But **Roethke** likely also intends these lines to suggest a more sinister subtext. A boy hanging on to his father is one thing, but "[hanging] on like death" has a decidedly more negative connotation. Similarly, while a "romp" is usually considered a fun and playful activity, the extent to which the boy and his father do so in this poem could also suggest violence; how often does a simple game between parents and children lead to pans falling off the wall? **Roethke's** ambiguous diction eventually leaves the reader conflicted, and this is the desired effect. By using language that has multiple meanings, he suggests that the way the boy feels about his father is complicated. In many ways, this is a common experience for children. They often have little control over their own lives and are often subject to larger forces (and in this case, larger people) at work. They may love and fear their parents, who are responsible for their care but may also be authoritative and frightening. **Roethke** suggests that the actual events of the dance are ultimately less important than the conflicting emotions they create for the speaker. The ambiguity of his diction in these lines communicates this conflict well.

Red = Topic sentence

Orange = Introduction and integration of quote

Green = Interpretation of quote (Supporting the idea that quote is ambiguous)

Blue = Interpretation of literary element in relation to theme (Supporting the idea that ambiguity is effective in communicating message about emotional complexity)

(Author's name is bold to highlight importance of focusing on author's choices, rather than only providing summary)