Annotate the following poem. Pay special attention to *what* the author says, as it will help you to determine *what* she means! As you read, underline, circle, or otherwise mark the poem to identify significant words, phrases, and literary elements.

**Rites of Passage – Sharon Olds**

As the guests arrive at my son’s party

They gather in the living room—

short men, men in first grade

with smooth jaws and chins.

Hands in pockets, they stand around 5

jostling, jockeying for place, small fights

breaking out and calming. One says to another

*How old are you? Six. I’m seven. So?*

They eye each other, seeing themselves

tiny in the other’s pupils. They clear their 10

throats a lot, a room of small bankers,

they fold their arms and frown. *I could beat you*

*up*, a seven says to a six,

the dark cake, round and heavy as a

turret, behind them on the table. My son, 15

freckles like specks of nutmeg on his cheeks,

chest narrow as the balsa keel of a

model boat, long hands

cool and thin as the day they guided him

out of me, speaks up as a host 20

for the sake of the group.

*We could easily kill a two-year-old*,

he says in his clear voice. The other

men agree, they clear their throats

like Generals, they relax and get down to 25

playing war, celebrating my son’s life.

**Analysis: “Rites of Passage”**

**1.** Paraphrase the poem by putting as much of it as you can in your own words.

**2.** Make a determination of the poet and poem’s purpose. What is it?

**3.** Now read the first four lines again:

As the guests arrive at my son’s party/ They gather in the living room—/short men, men in first grade/ with smooth jaws and chins.

Who is the speaker?

**4.** Read lines 12 to l5:

*. . . I could beat you/ up*, a seven says to a six,/ the dark cake, round and heavy as a/ turret, behind them on the table. . . .

What *simile* does the poet use to emphasize the belligerent (hostile) motif?

**5.** Now read lines 15 to 21.

. . . My son,/ freckles like specks of nutmeg on his cheeks,/ chest narrow as the balsa keel of a/ model boat, long hands/ cool and thin as the day they guided him/ out of me, speaks up as a host/ for the sake of the group.

What *images* does the speaker use to emphasize the youth and fragility of her son?

**6.** Despite these characteristics, what role does he assume?

**7.** Lines 22 and 23 serve as the poem’s *climax*:

*We could easily kill a two-year-old*, he says in his clear voice.

Why are these lines startling in the context of the poem?

**8.** What is *ironic* about the last four lines?

**9.** This is an appropriate time to revisit the title. Think about the connotations of the words *rites* and *passage.* What other “rites of passage” do you know of?

**11.** What do you think the poet is saying about human behavior (i.e., the poem’s theme) even as it is exhibited in small children?

**Synthesis Task**

Discuss the use of irony in “Rites of Passage” and Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est.” Which do you think is a more effective *antiwar poem*? Explain why**.**

**Brainstorm First**

“Rites of Passage” “Dulce et Decorum Est”

**Conclusion:**

**The Introduction**

Write an introduction for your synthesis essay on “Rites of Passage” and “Dulce et Decorum Est.”

Remember to include:

-a hook

-a topic sentence

-a outline of your points (your plan)

-a thesis statement

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