

William Carlos Williams and Archibald MacLeish Poetry Questions

“The Red Wheelbarrow” p. 780

1. Describe the setting of “The Red Wheelbarrow.”
2. What might Williams be saying about poetry or art by stating that “so much depends/ upon/ a red wheelbarrow”? Explain the significance of this thought.
3. The speaker opens with the dramatic assertion that “so much depends/ upon”— hinting that whatever follows will be extremely important. How does the rest of the poem overturn or meet the reader’s expectations?

“The Great Figure” p. 781

4. The painter Charles Henry Demuth was so struck by the imagery in “The Great Figure” that he painted The Figure in Gold (page 781). What do you see in the painting? What do you hear in the poem?
5. What one word is used to personify the firetruck? What affect does this have on the reader’s “feelings” about the action being described?

“This Is Just to Say” p. 782

6. Explain the meaning of the title “This Is Just to Say.” How might the poem change if the words I’m Sorry followed the words Say?
7. Whom is the speaker addressing? What response do you think the speaker will receive? Why?
8. Do you think we are meant to believe that the speaker is truly sorry? Why or why not?

“Ars Poetica” p. 788

9. MacLeish defines poetry by using a series of similes. List all of the things a poem should “be.”
10. How do the two images in line 20 suggest grief?
11. Some of the similes are contradictory. For example, how can a poem be “wordless”? How does the poem explain these contradictions?