

Name _____

EXAMPLE #1:

The world seems to be
Full of solid things
Flesh and bone
A spouse, a home;
But it shifts in an instant
To reveal itself a lie—
Not gossamer or tinsel
But a fragile, invisible
Construction am I—
Trust and hope
And confidence
All at the brink of imminent collapse
A word, a gesture, a single lapse
And the whole great thing
Comes tumbling down.

EXAMPLE #2

The summer that I grew up was the same summer that Mr. Williams next door took my father to court over a property dispute. I never did really understand all of the particulars, but it had to do with where a fence had been placed, and made my father grit his teeth whenever he pulled up our driveway, and let out a deep sigh of relief whenever we managed to get out of our front door, into our car and down the road without seeing Mr. Williams.

Rumors abounded. Mr. Williams was an ex-policeman, still licensed to carry a gun. People said he had been a sniper in Afghanistan; that he had been disposed of his badge due to psychological problems; that there were video cameras in all the trees around his property, and that he spent his evenings watching us kids on our bicycles, and in our own front yards, just waiting for something to blame us for.

DIRECTIONS: What is the theme of these two works? On a separate page, write an essay that compares and contrasts how each handles the theme.

The dispute between Mr. Williams and my father had started in January; by July they had been to court three times. Then one morning, it came to a head. My father was outside with the weed-whacker, trimming the grass along the fence in question, when Mr. Williams suddenly appeared from around it holding his reciprocating saw in one hand. My father was a big man; strong, tall and extremely self-composed. But Mr. Williams was almost impossibly bigger. From where I straddled my bicycle, some ten feet from them, I could feel the crackle of hostility. I watched anxiously; but to me it was like watching Superman about to best some overgrown arch-enemy. I had no doubts about my father's moral and physical superiority.

They began to argue. Then they began to shout and curse. Mr. Williams gesticulated with the reciprocating saw. I moved closer. I was debating whether or not to go inside and tell my mother what was going on when I caught my father's eye.

In what I saw there the world, which had previously been composed of solid things, began to peel apart. The surface furled away, and underneath was not anything solid at all, but layer upon layer of opaque, swirling ephemera—fear and indecision, want and desperation, horror and insecurity. It left me unable to move for fear that the very ground beneath me might dissolve. My father was not Superman in this scene at all, but a human being; disadvantaged, fragile, and afraid.

ESSAYS WILL VARY

The theme is the moment in which one discovers that things are not as they seem; that there is weakness and fragility where you did not expect it to be.