Sample Poetry Paragraph –
Thesis - William Stafford’s “My Father: October 1942”, and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* both suggest that while man is bound to an inescapable, predetermined fate, his choices and innate hunger for truth pave the road to his destiny.

William Stafford’s poem portrays a man whose own actions bring about his doom. From the very beginning, the narrator makes it clear that his father “picks up what he thinks / is a road map, and it is his death, and / nothing can take it from his firm hand” (Stafford 1-4). If the “road map” symbolizes his father’s fate, and he picks up this map of his own accord, is he not at fault for whatever befalls him? Even if done inadvertently, his attempt to grasp fate is still entirely voluntary. Thus, his death stems from a sense of curiosity, and only he can be held fully accountable. This idea is further exemplified when the narrator writes, “Any time anyone may pick up something / so right that he can’t put it down; / that is the problem for all who travel—they / fatally own whatever is really theirs” (9-12). Stafford emphasizes the existence of man’s free will through the use of conditional phrases and action verbs. Nowhere does he explicitly state that fate seeks out mankind, rather, he implies quite the opposite. Fate is the outcome of man’s collective choices. The true magnitude of its impact is not fully experienced until one chooses to accept his responsibility and the ensuing consequences. Stafford’s poem augments this notion as the narrator reflects, “Millions of observers guess all the time, but each person, / once, can say, ‘Sure.’ / Then he’s no longer an observer. He isn’t right, / or wrong. He just wins or loses” (Stafford 15-18). Though not always granted free will under any circumstance, man is still capable of denying facts clearly laid out before him, such as his own actions and identity. This locks him in a state of blissful ignorance. However, upon acknowledging these facts, he is enlightened and may see both himself and the world in a clearer perspective, even if the revelation brings excruciating pain. Man is the one who picks up his fate and holds it firmly in his grasp; he hunts it down relentlessly in hopes of seeking answers, in hopes of freeing himself from ignorance’s reign. The aforementioned thoughts resonate within *Oedipus the King*, as Oedipus intentionally searches for answers surrounding the plague of Thebes and his own past, eventually leading to his own downfall.

What to look for…

1. Examine the topic sentence. Is there a clear connection between the topic sentence and the thesis? Does the topic sentence enhance the thesis and/or build towards a more in-depth examination of the selected topic?
2. Are the examples selected by the author properly embedded in the text? Does the author establish a clear connection between the quote and the central idea of the paragraph? Do the quotes work together to develop a clear, insightful message?
3. Does the paragraph convey an appropriate tone? Since this is an analytical essay, your diction and phrasing should work towards establishing an academic tone?
4. Clarity – Assume that your reader is intelligent but unfamiliar with the selected works. When reading your essay, could he/she follow your arguments? Does this paragraph properly set up the context while avoiding superfluous plot summary?
5. Brevity is the soul of wit (or so says a somewhat foolish character in *Hamlet*). Are there any unnecessary lines/phrases in this paragraph or does the author do a satisfactory job of including only relevant information that develops his/her central argument?