Sample Outline for Explication of a Poem

Purpose: to explicate Robert Frost's "Design"

Thesis: Frost's poem raises the question of whether there is a Designer, or an evil Designer, or no Designer at all.

[Note: the thesis is a general appraisal of the poem's most urgent theme or point; you are not exactly proving the thesis as you would in a typical theme.]

Plan:
1. to introduce the poem by discussing the title
2. to analyze the first quatrain
3. to analyze the second quatrain
4. to analyze the sestet
5. to conclude by bringing together all the parts already explicated to explain the point of the thesis statement

Outline:

I. Analysis of the title, "Design"
   A. Definition of design from dictionary, including its denotation and connotations
   B. Argument for existence of God because of design of universe
   C. Design as a sinister scheme
   D. Narrowing of generalizations to the thesis statement

II. Analysis of the first quatrain
   A. Form of the poem: sonnet
   B. First eight lines about spider and moth
   C. Word analysis of dimpled and fat
   D. Word analysis of the irony of heal-all
   E. Emotions created by the moth--sorrow
   F. Connotations of satin
      1. Formality of satin
      2. Accurate description of moth's wings
      3. Lining of a coffin
   G. Explanation of the spider, flower, and moth as assorted characters

III. Analysis of the second quatrain
   A. Invisible hand enters
      1. Characters mixed as if by design
      2. A force behind the scene?
   B. Spider's feast becoming more diabolical
   C. Analysis of the pun: morning right and rite
   D. Simile in line 7: ambiguity in it
1. Beauty of froth
2. Ugliness and horror of froth: dualism in nature

IV. Analysis of sestet
   A. Summary of the poem up to this point
   B. Quotation by Radcliffe Squires and follow-up commentary
   C. Explication of designer of darkness to appall
      1. Rhetorical question whose answer suggests someone diabolical
      2. **Appall** as pun on "a pall"
   D. Word study of **steered**
   E. Connotations of **brought**

V. Conclusion: analysis of the overall theme of poem
   A. Universe in the hands of someone or something
      1. Fate?
      2. Devil?
   B. Final note of doubt
   C. Quotation from Bible: "His eye is on the sparrow" and follow-up commentary
   D. Does chance govern us all, if there is no Designer?
   E. Or is there a Designer, who plays dice with mankind?