Poetry Analysis Questions—William Carlos Williams

"The Red Wheelbarrow"—p. 666

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

1. How could "so much" depend on a wheelbarrow? What, specifically, could depend on a wheelbarrow? Explain.
2. Williams is famous for turning ordinary objects into poetic subjects with deep meaning. How does he accomplish this in "The Red Wheelbarrow"?
3. List all words from the poem that are crucial to the imagery.

"The Great Figure"—p. 668

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
fire truck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

4. What does the title lead you to believe the poem will be about?
5. Which poem has a stronger image: "The Red Wheelbarrow" or "The Great Figure"? Why?

"This Is Just to Say"—p. 669

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

6. Why do you think Williams titled the poem as he did? To whom do you imagine the title is directed?
7. Considering imagery appeals to the senses, what senses does this poem refer to? Does this poem differ compared to the other two in terms of which senses it refers to? Explain.
8. Artists from Williams's era developed the concept of the "found object," an ordinary item (a rock, a newspaper, etc.) regarded as art. What sort of "found object" could this poem have stemmed from?

After you read—read over the biography on p. 665:

9. Williams developed a style called objectivism. What could that mean (break the word down)? How does it apply to these poems?
10. Knowing that he opposed other poets of his time, how does his poetry differ from that of writers such as T. S. Eliot and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"?
11. Which of the three poems is the most successful use of imagery? Defend your opinion.