

## Reading and Analyzing Poetry Guidelines 2019

### LEVEL 1 → Foundation Reading: getting the basics

- Read** the poem straight through once, including the title. Be confused.
    - To a lesser degree, check the poet and the year. Sometimes you can get clues from the poet's style and the era in which the poem was written
  - Determine **who the speaker is AND what the subject is** (Ex: speaker is a farmer, the subject is flowers; the speaker is someone at a museum, the subject is art; the speaker is a human, the subject is a dog)
  - Using speaker and subject, name the **literal situation** (Ex. A man is looking at an ancient Greek pot at a museum and reflecting, a college student goes home for his brother's funeral, a person is looking at her dog sleeping)
  - Examine and annotate the poem's **structure**. Look for any natural or obvious divisions in the stanzas, and chunk the poem. Alternately, you can find where the ideas begin and end by looking for capitalization and periods.
  - Read the poem again and mark **where ideas shift or turn**. For each section, ask yourself:
    - Is this section similar to or different from the previous section? Is it adding onto or amplifying the ideas? Is it diminishing, detracting from, or changing from the previous section? How?
  - Is there an apparent or driving **conflict or struggle**? What is it?
  - What does the overall **tone** of the poem seem to be? What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject? Towards herself or himself? Towards another?
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### LEVEL 2 → Analytical Reading: examining the effects of technique and device

- Examine **repetition** and/or **double meanings of words** (puns, word play)
    - What is the poet emphasizing through repetition or playing with the word meaning?
    - How does the poet change overall meaning by doing this?
  - Examine **imagery**
    - What is made more vivid or pronounced by the details and sensory language?
    - What effect does the imagery have? What is the poet trying to emphasize?
  - Examine **figurative language or symbol**
    - What are the **metaphors** and/or **similes**? (same for hyperbole, allusion, personification, etc., and symbol)
    - What new information or dimension does each **comparison** (or hyperbole, allusion, personification, symbol, etc.) add? (ex. Comparison to a flower adds delicacy and beauty, whereas comparison to a construction worker adds a sense of toughness and purpose)
    - How do the **metaphors** (or hyperbole, allusion, personification, symbol, etc.) change throughout the poem, if at all?
    - How does this metaphor (or hyperbole, allusion, personification, symbol, etc.) build on the one before or change the meaning?
    - How does the **subject** become more complex as metaphors (or hyperbole, allusion, personification, symbol, etc.) are added?
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### STEP 3 → Thematic, Interpretive Reading: Putting it all together

- Confirm the speaker's **tone(s)**. Notice where it shifts to become more complex or where it deepens.
  - Check to see how repetition, word play, imagery, or figurative language impact tone
- Theme and interpretation:** Write a phrase or sentence—what is the overall, deeper truth is the poet is trying to communicate?
  - Examine the speaker's attitude towards subject. Is it consistent? Does it change? If it changes, how?

- ❑ Examine how layers of meaning and nuance are built through various devices like figurative language
- ❑ Be careful of cliché (ex. Love conquers all) and oversimplification
- ❑ Some examples of thematic interpretation in an essay:
  - ❑ The specific details used to describe the landlady's behavior demonstrates **how a life lacking in human connection cannot give one a sense of fulfillment.**
  - ❑ The speaker warns the audience **not to underestimate the clever machinations of plants, characterizing them as manipulative beings whose goal is to take over the world.** The speaker argues his point through sinister diction, personification of plant life, and direct addresses to the audience.
  - ❑ Through the use of comparative metaphorical language and auditory language, Harper conveys **the timeless and uniquely personal nature of music in its ability to evoke the emotionality of her childhood** to her father.
  - ❑ Through the utilization of frequent alliteration and somewhat off-kilter rhyme, as well as diction evoking an almost spiritual level of power in reference to the juggler, the speaker creates an **image of a juggler managing to overcome gravity, to lift spirits as well as objects, and reveals their own inability to overcome dull monotonous days forever lacking brilliance.**
  - ❑ This experience was clearly significant to the pair as Walcott sets a magical portrait that best **describes the wonders and amazement of young boys as they immerse themselves in the journey to the storyteller's house and the stories themselves.** Walcott uses devices such as diction, naturalistic imagery, personification, and metaphor to portray **the significance of this magical experience to himself and his brother.**