

Poetry Analysis Guide

I. Meaning/Theme (and how to read your poem)

Discover the poem's message to the reader--what was the poet really trying to communicate? Use the following questions to help you talk about the themes.

1. Look at the title. What does it mean? How does it contribute to the overall meaning of the poem? Can you predict anything about the poem from the title?
2. Read the poem silently and then aloud. Write down all the ideas or thoughts the poem gives you. Write down any questions you have about the poem.
3. Pay attention to the punctuation and use it as you read: commas are a short pause, semi-colons are a major pause between connected ideas, colons signal something is coming, periods are a major stop, and a dash is an informal way of showing a connection between ideas. **Read the poem aloud again**, paying attention to the punctuation and how it influences meaning.
4. Can you find more than one meaning in the poem?
5. What is the tone of the poem? What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject of the poem?
6. What is the theme—what idea is the poet communicating about the subject?
7. Paraphrase or summarize the poem in your own words. What are the key lines—the lines that contribute the most to the meaning of the poem?

II. Pattern and Form

1. Is the poem a traditional form or type, such as sonnet, ballad, pastoral, etc?
2. How many lines does the poem have? Does the arrangement of lines have an effect on the meaning such as that in a sonnet?
3. **Rhyme scheme:** Is the poem rhymed or unrhymed? If it is rhymed, are rhymed words at the ends of the lines or in the middle of the lines? Describe the rhyme scheme used, if any.
4. **Meter:** When you read the poem, do you notice a particular rhythm or meter? Mark the rhythm, and decide if there is a regular pattern. How does the rhythm contribute to the meaning of the poem?

III. Images and other poetic devices

1. Poets use sensory language--words that appeal to our sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch-- to enhance our experience.
What words or phrases in the poem appeal to the senses? What effect do these words have on the overall effect of the poem?
2. **Words**—Look at the connotation of certain key words in the poem. Do any of them have meanings beyond the literal meaning?
Are there any words used in the poem that you will need to define for you classmates?
3. Does the poem contain any of the following **poetic devices**?
 - a. **allusion**--a reference in one piece of literature to a person, place, or event in history, art, or another piece of literature

- b. **metaphor**--a comparison between two objects without using the words "like" or "as." An example is, "A summer is a dark blue hammock slung between two pillars of day."
 - c. **personification**--a figure of speech which endows animals, ideas, or inanimate objects with human traits or abilities. An example is, "Fog nestled sleeping in the valley." If personification appears in this poem, identify which human traits are applied to what non-human thing. What effect does this have on the reader?
 - d. **paradox**--a statement that seems contradictory yet it is true. An example is, "To be great is to be misunderstood" or "Good men must not obey laws too well."
 - e. **simile**--a comparison between two objects using words such as "like," "as," or "than." An example is, "The big ram had horns curling like a morning glory vine."
 - f. **symbolism**
 - g. **hyperbole** or other devices?
4. See if the poem contains any of the following **sound devices**.
- a. **alliteration**--the repetition of initial consonant sounds like "blooms and blows" or "merriment their melody" OR are **consonance** or **assonance** used?
 - b. **onomatopoeia**--the use of words that imitate sounds like "tinkle, snicker, clattered, sizzle"
 - c. **repetition** of words or lines

III. The Poet

Read about the life of the poet. Is there anything in the poet's life that connects directly to the poem, a specific event or a person? How does the poem reflect the time period in which it was written?

Please note that these points are NOT necessarily in the order in which you should write about them! This is a guide for you to gather your ideas and information about the poem.

so you want to be a writer?

by Charles Bukowski

if it doesn't come bursting out of you
in spite of everything,
don't do it.

unless it comes unmasked out of your
heart and your mind and your mouth
and your gut,
don't do it.

if you have to sit for hours
staring at your computer screen
or hunched over your
typewriter
searching for words,
don't do it.

if you're doing it for money or
fame,
don't do it.

if you're doing it because you want
women in your bed,
don't do it.

if you have to sit there and
rewrite it again and again,
don't do it.

if it's hard work just thinking about doing it,
don't do it.

if you're trying to write like somebody
else,
forget about it.

if you have to wait for it to roar out of
you,
then wait patiently.
if it never does roar out of you,
do something else.

if you first have to read it to your wife
or your girlfriend or your boyfriend
or your parents or to anybody at all,
you're not ready.

don't be like so many writers,
don't be like so many thousands of

people who call themselves writers,
don't be dull and boring and
pretentious, don't be consumed with self-
love.

the libraries of the world have
yawned themselves to
sleep

over your kind.
don't add to that.
don't do it.

unless it comes out of
your soul like a rocket,
unless being still would
drive you to madness or
suicide or murder,
don't do it.

unless the sun inside you is
burning your gut,
don't do it.

when it is truly time,
and if you have been chosen,
it will do it by
itself and it will keep on doing it
until you die or it dies in you.

there is no other way.

and there never was.

Poetry

by Marianne Moore

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond
all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one
discovers in

it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes

that can dilate, hair that can rise

if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because
they are

useful. When they become so derivative as to become
unintelligible,

the same thing may be said for all of us, that we

do not admire what

we cannot understand: the bat

holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless
wolf under

a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse

that feels a flea, the base-

ball fan, the statistician--

nor is it valid

to discriminate against "business documents and

school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must make
a distinction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the

result is not poetry,

nor till the poets among us can be

"literalists of

the imagination"--above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them,"
shall we have

it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,

the raw material of poetry in

all its rawness and

that which is on the other hand

genuine, you are interested in poetry.