
Reading Poetry

Mini-Lessons in Poetry
The American Dream

How Do I Read Poetry?

- ▶ First: Literal Meaning (Summarize)
 - ▶ Look up unclear words
 - ▶ Paraphrase each line, couple lines, stanza, or section
 - ▶ Check for words that were left out, punctuation that groups parts together
- ▶ Second: Deeper Meaning
 - ▶ Make associations for meaning
 - ▶ Imagery
 - ▶ Emotion
 - ▶ Allusions
 - ▶ Figurative Language

Writing About a Poem's Form

- ▶ **Rhythm: Meter**
 - ▶ Often easier to hear when read aloud
 - ▶ Check for a *noticeable* rhythm - like a nursery rhyme
 - ▶ What effect does the rhythm have
 - ▶ EX: drives the lines forward quickly, accents certain words, makes it feel lighthearted
- ▶ **Rhyme (and other sound devices)**
- ▶ **Punctuation and line breaks**
- ▶ **Stanzas, couplets and quatrains**
- ▶ **Closed forms (like sonnet)**

Writing About Poetic Language

- ▶ **Connotation and Denotation**
 - ▶ Connotation is the feeling associated with the word
 - ▶ Denotation is the dictionary definition
 - ▶ EX: inquisitive vs. nosy
- ▶ **Figurative Language (Simile, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.)**
 - ▶ Go beyond what the simile means to why the author chose that particular figure of speech
 - ▶ EX: fast as a rabbit, fast as lightning, fast as a racecar - all mean very fast, but they're different
- ▶ **Imagery**
 - ▶ What pictures did the author “paint” in your head? Why?
- ▶ **Symbolism**
 - ▶ What could it stand for?

Writing About a Poem's Speaker

► Speaker

- The speaker is NOT the same as the author (necessarily)
- The author may adopt a *persona* - a character who may be similar or very different than the author
- Use clues within the poem to figure out what the speaker is like
- Use biographical information to figure out if the speaker and the author are similar or the same

► Tone

- The attitude of the writer toward the subject matter of the work
- Verbal Irony - watch for obvious opposites of what you'd expect, or subtle hints that all add up to an opposite message than what you'd expect (sarcasm)
- Describing tone with just the right word is important but can be hard - avoid simply saying "positive" or "negative"