

How to Read a Poem to Extract Meaning

1. Study the TITLE.
 - Try to determine what the author's focus (perspective, point of view) is.
 - Anticipate the tone.
 - What would you guess the subject to be from the title?
2. Read the poem, aloud if possible.
 - Read poetry, as you do prose, in sentences, NOT lines.
 - Mark off each sentence (/) as you read.
 - When you finish, stop and think about how you feel and what you understand about the poem after reading it the first time.
3. READ the poem AGAIN.
 - This time, PARAPHRASE AS YOU GO. Jot down main ideas of each stanza to the left of the poem in the margin.
 - Who is the persona? What do you know about him/her based on what is said in the poem?
 - Activate prior knowledge. What do you know about this subject already? Is the poet addressing the subject in a way you would expect? Or is he/she seeing the subject in a way you've never considered?
 - Look for **connections, patterns and contrasts**.

When you are required to *analyze* a poem, move on to the next step:

4. Look at the **techniques** the poet is using.
 - Look for connotative diction (emotionally loaded words)
 - Figurative language
 - Imagery
 - Syntax (repetition, inversion, etc)
 - Other devices
 - **LOOK FOR THE PATTERNS**
5. Determine HOW the **techniques** contribute to the meaning by considering the author's intent in using those techniques.