m have a regular meter? If so, what is it?

m aloud. How does the meter affect the tone of the poem? For s the meter make the poem seem formal, informal, singsongy, omber?

m follow a traditional form? If so, which?

follows a traditional form, but has untraditional content, what poet's purpose in subverting the traditional form?

does not follow a traditional form, what sort of logic structures or instance, why are the stanzas broken as they are? What is the among the stanzas?

les of enjambment can you find? How does the enjambment nd and meaning of the line?

les of caesura can you find? What is the impact of the caesura?

as sentences, are they long or short or a combination of the two? e length of the sentences relate to the meaning of the poem?

poem use rhyme, meter, form, and poetic syntax to create sound?

e poem use repetition, such as alliteration and assonance, to cre-

unds created in the poem connect to the meaning of the poem?

g sonnet by John Keats to answer the questions above.

would I were stedfast as thou art—

uld I were stedfast as thou art—
plendor hung aloft the night,
with eternal lids apart,
patient, sleepless Eremite,[1]
ters at their priestlike task
tion round earth's human shores,
he new soft-fallen masque
n the mountains and the moors—

one under a religious vow.—Eds.

No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft swell and fall,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death—

[1820]

A Sample Close Analysis

Now that we've considered some of the specific techniques poets use to convey their message, let's look at a poem by Robert Herrick, "Delight in Disorder," in which he describes the appeal of dressing in a way that is careless—or seemingly so.

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.
A lawn[1] about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthralls the crimson stomacher,[2]
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbons to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoestring, in whose tie
I see a wild civility;
Do more bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.

[1648]

This is a great poem for practicing close reading. Written over 350 years ago, it may seem difficult at first; after a few readings, though, its meaning becomes clear, and it offers some obvious examples of how style and structure create deeper meaning and nuance.

First, be sure you understand what Herrick is talking about. The speaker describes in detail a woman's clothing—style, color, and fabric. Some of the vocabulary is unfamiliar to readers today, such as *lawn* and *stomacher*. Other words, such as *petticoat*, may be **archaic**, but you have probably come across them before. As always, if you don't know what something means, you should look it up.

As you read the poem, you might have noticed the personification. The speaker notes the "fine distraction" of the scarf thrown over the woman's shoulders, a "cuff"

[1]Linen scarf.—Eds.
[2]A piece of stiff, embroidered cloth worn over the stomach.—Eds.

that is "neglectful," ribbons that "flow confusedly," and a "tempestuous petticoat." The personification suggests that the clothes reflect qualities of the person wearing them. Similarly, the "erring lace" "[e]nthralls the crimson stomacher," as if a mere decoration could take such deliberate action. Two **oxymorons** (paradoxes made up of two seemingly contradictory words) support the possibility that something is going on other than the literal description of clothing. The opening line refers to a "sweet disorder," but most would consider disorder unsettling, hardly "sweet"; later, the speaker sees a "wild civility," another seeming contradiction, because how can "civility"—or courteous behavior—be "wild"? Now that you're aware of the personification and the oxymorons in this poem, reread it to see if you can pick up on what they suggest.

Note the words suggesting passion: *Kindles, wantonness, crimson, tempestuous,* and *bewitch.* Is this poem actually about seduction? If so, its indirect manner is not overtly sexual or vulgar but flirtatious, sly, even mischievous. Alliteration adds a teasing singsong quality: "Delight . . . Disorder," "winning wave," and "precise . . . part." Further, the symmetry of the alliteration brings a bit of order into the description of disorder—but only a bit.

We might look to the structure of the poem for further evidence of the playful tone. The structure seems regular and predictable. The fourteen lines are presented in seven rhymed pairs, or couplets, most having eight syllables. The opening and closing couplets have exactly rhyming final syllables ("dress" / "wantonness" and "art" / "part"). Notice the neatly repeating **parallel structure** of lines 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. However, there are inconsistencies within the poem. Some of the rhymes are only near rhymes (e.g., ll. 11 and 12: "tie" does not rhyme with "civility"). The poem's lines are in iambic tetrameter, but the rhythm is not always even. The evenness of the opening line, for instance ("A sweet disorder in the dress") is violated by line 10 ("In the tempestuous petticoat"). It seems Herrick's contention that "disorder" can be "sweet" is reflected in the structure of the poem.

Or, put in more thematic terms, Herrick might be reminding us that appearances can be deceiving, that perfection may not be as appealing as charming imperfections. Or, given the cultural mores of his time dictating strict outward propriety, he might be telling his readers that passion lurks just beneath the veneer of polite society.

• ACTIVITY •

Spend some time reading the following poem by Simon Ortiz closely. Analyze how the poem's style and structure help the reader understand why the speaker needs his father's song and what that song might be.

My Father's Song

SIMON ORTIZ

Wanting to say things,
I miss my father tonight.
His voice, the slight catch,
the depth from his thin chest,
the tremble of emotion
in something he has just said
to his son, his song:

We planted corn one Spring at Acu—
we planted several times
but this one particular time
I remember the soft damp sand
in my hand.

My father had stopped at one point
to show me an overturned furrow;
the plowshare had unearthed
the burrow nest of a mouse
in the soft moist sand.

Very gently, he scooped tiny pink animals
into the palm of his hand
and told me to touch them.
We took them to the edge
of the field and put them in the shade
of a sand moist clod.

I remember the very softness
of cool and warm sand and tiny alive mice
and my father saying things.

[19

Talking with the Text

To become a more careful reader, the most important and helpful thing you c
read, read, and reread, but there are some techniques that can make your readi
active. The most important point to keep in mind is that your goal is not si
identify and list **literary elements**—although that's a first step—but to analy
effect. In other words, how do the choices the writer makes help to deliver th
message or meaning? We'll discuss several strategies to help you become a mo
reader, a reader who goes beyond summary to analysis and interpretation.

Think Aloud

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the first step to close reading i
asking questions. These can be simple ones (such as the meaning of unfamiliar
lary) or more complex ones (such as the meaning suggested by figurative languag
the goal is to "talk with the text," a good place to start is by talking to one another