

APPROACHING POETRY

Poetry is a historic and valued form of expression. However, it can be conflicting, unintelligible, and frustrating at times. Here's a path to approach a poem and write some solid analysis.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING?

Read the poem again, identifying what is **literal** and what is **figurative**. Ask yourself why the speaker would be figurative rather than literal?

WHO'S TALKING AND WHY ARE THEY TALKING?

Once you've gotten the bulk of the poem's "story" down, consider the poem's **speaker**. What is his/her purpose in the poem? What can you learn about him or her?

WHAT EMOTIONS DRIVE THE POEM?

Return again to tone. Now that you've studied the speaker and any shifts in the poem, analyze how the **tone is unique**. Does it evolve? Is it conflicted? Is it from an unlikely source?

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This is where you look for **universal meanings** or **themes** of the poem. The poem's plot or language may not be universal, but its emotions probably are. What relatable or universal messages does the poem relate? And how can these themes live beyond the life of a poet?

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL? UNEXPECTED? GROUNDBREAKING?

Finally, move back to your writing prompt or directive. What makes this poem unique enough that you can analyze it for **poetic elements**, the speaker's **perspective**, and relatable and complex **message**?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Study the **plot** of the poem. Consider what is going on and, if possible, why it matters.

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

Does it create feelings of joy or sadness? Does it evoke feelings through appealing to certain sights or sounds? By studying the poem's **tone** and **imagery**, you can study the experience of the poem and learn more about the speaker.

WHERE DOES IT CHANGE?

Look through the poem again and identify any **shifts**. These could be shifts in **tone**, **perspective**, **style**, **structure**, or **subject**. Then ask, what effect does the shift have on the poem's message?

HOW IS IT COMPLICATED?

What elements does the poet use to make the poem complicated? Where can you find **figurative language**? **Sound or musical elements**? How did the poet complicate the **form**, the **diction**, or the **style**? In everything you find, ask yourself why these complications exist and how they contribute to the poem.

WHAT MAKES IT COMPLEX?

Great poetry is complex, meaning more than one thing is happening at once. To find complexity, we want to identify strong **contrasts** or **juxtaposition**. For example, the speaker may feel lonely but also induced to stay isolated. What can you identify that complex in this poem?



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