

## Poetry Analysis

### APSU Writing Center Handout

Uncovers the author's intentions by examining language, literary devices, and cultural context, while interpreting the work as a whole.

Prioritizes analyzing the poem line by line and connecting details to the main ideas.

### Steps for Close Reading

#### Reading for Comprehension

Understand the literal events in the poem.

- **Example:** The narrator walks through a winter forest, noticing falling leaves.

Note the situation and attitude of the narrator or speaker.

Identify the general point or story.

#### Questioning the Passage

Ask what the passage reveals about the narrator.

- **Example:** The narrator is lonely and reflective.

Ask what it reveals about other characters.

Ask if there is a hidden or implied meaning

#### Analyze Language

Observe word choice, adjectives, and descriptive phrases.

- **Example:** "The crimson sky burned at dusk" is vivid and dramatic imagery.

Examine pronouns and references.

Identify metaphors, symbolism, and other literary devices.

Connect the passage to other passages or works.

- **Consider Elements**

### **Speaker**

Identify if the poem is in first-person, is a personal observation, or about someone else.

### **Theme**

Identify significant themes such as love, death, war, peace, etc.

- **Example:** Grief and memory in Whitman's elegy for Lincoln.

### **Genre**

Determine the type of poem such as a sonnet, ode, elegy, satire, epic, lyrical.

- **Example:** Sonnet 18 is a 14-line poem with iambic pentameter.

Consider if the poem follows a literary movement.

- **Examples:** Romanticism, Modernism, Renaissance, etc.

### **Tone or Mood**

Identify the emotions evoked in the poem such as joy, sorrow, anger, peace, etc.

- **Example:** Wordsworth's nature poetry has a calm and peaceful mood.

Notice irony, satire, or humor.

Read the poem aloud to catch rhythm and tone.

### **Versification**

Examine rhyme scheme, meter, and syllable patterns.

- **Example:** ABAB rhyme in a Shakespearean sonnet.

## Word Choice

Observe connotations vs. denotations.

**Connotation:** The emotional or cultural associations a word carries.

- **Example:** The word “bitter” evokes both taste and emotional pain.

**Denotation:** The literal, dictionary meaning of a word.

## Imagery

Observe sensory details such as sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

- **Example:** The aroma of baked bread filled the kitchen, warm and comforting.

## Cultural Context

Consider the historical or cultural background.

- **Example:** Whitman’s poem reflects post-Civil War mourning in the U.S.

## Writing Techniques

Note end-stopped lines, enjambment, or caesura.

**End-stopped line:** Ends with punctuation, creating a pause.

- **Example:** “The sun sets slowly, / painting the sky in gold.”

**Enjambment:** Runs over to the next line without a pause.

- **Example:** “The wind blew / through the night / and carried whispers of forgotten songs.”

**Caesura:** Pause in the middle of a line.

- **Example:** “To be, or not to be — that is the question.”

## **After Reading the Poem**

### **Interpret the Poem**

Develop a thesis that argues a point about the poem.

- **Example:** Whitman’s elegy conveys the deep emotional impact of Lincoln’s death while celebrating national resilience.

Support your thesis using language, imagery, figures of speech, tone, and cultural context.

Analyze what the different elements reveal about the writer’s perspective.

Consider if you agree or disagree with what the writer is expressing?

### **Identify Figures of Speech**

**Metaphor:** A comparison between two unlike things without using "like" or "as".

**Example:** Time is a thief.

**Simile:** A comparison between two unlike things using "like" or "as".

**Example:** Her eyes sparkled like stars.

**Metonymy:** A word or phrase represents something closely related.

**Example:** “The crown” = the king.

**Synecdoche:** A part represents the whole.

**Example:** “All hands on deck” = the crew.

**Personification:** Assigns human characteristics to a non-human thing.

**Example:** The wind whispered through the trees.

Litotes: Uses a double negative to create emphasis.

Example: “Not unlike” or “not displeased.”

Irony: A difference between what is said and what is meant or expected.

Example: Saying “Lovely weather” during a storm.

**Introduction:** Introduce the poem and author then present a strong thesis statement.

**Body Paragraph 1:** Examine the literal events of the poem and analyze the speaker’s voice.

**Body Paragraph 2:** Examine one aspect of language at a time per paragraph. (ex: word choice)

**Body Paragraph 3:** Analyze one figure of speech at a time per paragraph. (ex: metaphor)

**Conclusion:** Restate your thesis in new words, summarize your analysis points and reflect on the poem’s impact.

## References

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