

TP-CASTT

Analyzing poetry

There are many methods and approaches to analyzing poetry to discover what message the poet is trying to convey. Most methods focus on the following aspects of the poem.

Title Ponder the title before reading the poem
Many times the title of the poem can give insight into the poem. Thinking about the title before reading can give the reader an idea of what the poem may be about and give the reader an idea of what to focus on in the poem

Paraphrase Translate the poem into your own words
Many times, real understanding of a poem must evolve from understanding “what’s going on in the poem”. The reader should restate the poem into his own words when reading it through the first time.

Connotation Contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal
Look for the emotional overtones of word choice. Also, identify all poetic devices. Consider figurative language, symbolism, diction, point of view, and sound devices. Decide why the poet uses the words and language that she uses.

Attitude Observe both the speaker’s attitude and the poet’s tone
Examination of diction, images, and details suggests the speaker’s attitude toward the subject.

Shifts Note shifts in speakers and in attitudes
Rarely does a poet begin and end a poem in the same place. The student’s discovery of the movement is critical to his understanding of the poem.

The discovery of shift can be facilitated if students watch for the following:

- 🔍 Key words (but, yet, however, although)
- 🔍 Punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, ellipsis)
- 🔍 Stanza divisions
- 🔍 Changes in line or stanza length or both
- 🔍 Irony (sometimes irony hides shifts)
- 🔍 Effect of structure on meaning
- 🔍 Changes in sound that may indicate changes in meaning
- 🔍 Changes in diction (slang to formal language)

Title Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level
Relate the title to the meaning of the poem. Is there meaning beyond your original idea?

Theme Determine what the poet is saying
In identifying theme, the student will recognize the human experience, motivation, or condition suggested by the poem.

One way to arrive at the theme is to:

First, summarize the “plot” of the poem in a paragraph (in writing or orally).

Second, list the subject or subjects of the poem (moving from the literal subjects to abstract concepts such as death, war, discovery).

Then determine what the poet is saying about each subject and write a complete sentence.

You have now identified theme.