HOW TO ANALYZE A POEM

Dave’s English Class
Forsyth Satellite Academy HS
• Poets construct poems on purpose
• Every word and space has meaning
• All aspects (parts) of a poem contribute to the meaning
• Most poems have many layers to uncover

Why Poems will always be a part of my life.
Elements to Analyze

- Visual Elements
- Lyric Devices
- Literal Meaning
- Figurative Meaning
- Imagery
- Historical context
- Theme

We look at these parts to determine the meaning of the poem—some poets do not make use of all devices.

As we investigate each part of the poem, we must ask, “why did the poem make use of this device?” “How does it contribute to the poem’s meaning?”
Visual elements

• Before we even read, do we notice anything visually about the poem?
  – Is the shape unique?
  – Do we notice any different uses of punctuation or of another convention?
The Negro Speaks of Rivers
Langston Hughes

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Many people look at this poem and feel that Langston Hughes shaped it like the flow of a river.
Night Practice

I will remember with my breath to make a mountain, with my sucked-in breath a valley, with my pushed-out breath a mountain. I will make a valley wider than the whisper, I will make a higher mountain than the cry, will with my will breathe a mountain. I will with my will breathe a valley. I will push out a mountain, suck in a valley, deeper than the shout YOU MUST DIE harder, heavier, sharper a mountain than the truth YOU MUST DIE. I will remember. My breath will make a mountain. My will will remember to will. I, sucking, pushing, I will breathe a valley, I will breathe a mountain.

MAY SWENSON
Emily Dickinson

I Never Saw a Moor

I NEVER saw a moor--
I never saw the sea--
Yet know I how the heather looks--
And what a wave must be.
I never spoke with God--
Nor visited in heaven--
Yet certain am I of the spot--
As if the chart were given

Both of these poems make unique use of conventions—we call this poetic license

e e cummings

In Just--

spring when the world is mud-

luscious the little lame baloonman
whistles far and wee
and eddyandbill come running from
marbles and piracies
and it’s
spring
when the world is puddle-wonderful
the queer
old baloonman
whistles far and wee
and bettyandisbel
• *Do we notice that the poem has a specific number of lines or stanzas?*

• *Does the number of lines or stanzas make us think that it might be a specific kind of poem [like haiku or a sonnet?]*
We give stanzas of specific line length names

**couplet**

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*
*Thou art more lovely and more temperate:*
*Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,*
*And summer's lease hath all too short a date:*
*Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,*
*And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;*
*And every fair from fair sometime declines,*
*By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;*
*But thy eternal summer shall not fade*
*Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;*
*Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,*
*When in eternal lines to time thou growest:*
*So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,*
*So long lives this and this gives life to thee.*

**quatrain**

**sestet**

**octave**
Lyric devices

Lyric devices are elements that a writer makes use of to give his/her poem a pleasing sound.

Think about the songs you like, or childhood stories, many of them had fun rhymes or repetitive sounds.

Poetry is meant to be read out loud, therefore it should sound pleasing to the ear.
Lyric devices

Rhyme is the most obvious lyric device

- end rhyme
- rhyme scheme (pattern)
- internal rhyme
- sight rhyme

Do You like green eggs and ham?
I do not like them
Sam-I-Am
I do not like Green Eggs
And ham.
Lyric devices

Rhyme Scheme

Soneto XXIII
En tanto que de rosa y azúcar, se muestra la color en vuestro guante, y que vuestro mirar ardiente, hondamente enciende el corazón y lo refresca.

Internal Rhyme

Internal Rhyme is rhyming within a line.

I awoke to black flak.

We designate the end sound with a letter of the alphabet. Then we use the letters to graph a pattern.

Sight Rhyme

Words that are spelled alike but that are pronounced differently—said and paid or again and rain.
Lyric devices

- Another important lyric device is alliteration
- This is the repetition of same sounds
- The words in a poem can start or end with the same sound
  - Assonance
  - Consonance

Six sleek swans swam swiftly southwards
Lyric devices

• Repetition of words or phrases creates certain patterns or cadences of sound

The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveler hastens toward the town,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveler to the shore.
And the tide rises, the tide falls.
Literal Meaning

- Poems have many *layers of meaning*.
- The literal meaning is the first layer—what is happening in the poem?
- What is the poem about?
- To understand the literal meaning a reader needs to *paraphrase* [summarize in his/her own words]
- Long poems must be paraphrased line by line or stanza by stanza in order to be understood
Figurative devices contribute to a deeper or secondary layer of meaning.
- Metaphor/simile
- Allusion
- Symbolism
Metaphors and Similes

Both of these devices compare objects that are not alike.

**Metaphor**
- He is a fox
- The car is a cell
- I am hot for her

**Simile**
- She runs like the wind
- Clouds like cotton candy
- The rain is falling like cats and dogs.

A metaphor is a direct comparison whereas a simile is an indirect comparison. In other words—the two objects in a metaphor are equal and the objects in a simile are comparable.
Allusion

An allusion is a reference to something outside the poem. Usually the reference is mythological, biblical, historical, literary, or from current events.

**Pollyanna**—simplistically looks at the bright side (novel by Eleanor H. Porter)

What bird is associated with new births?—stork

The concept of "tilting at windmills" is a literary allusion to what? The story of Don Quixote (by Miguel Cervantes)

An act that might let loose many unforeseen and unmanageable problems might be described as—opening Pandora’s box [Greek Mythology]
Details which use the five senses to describe a vivid mental picture

"Holes in my confidence, holes in the knees of my jeans."
--Paul Simon

"I was as empty of life as a scarecrow's pockets."
--Raymond Chandler

--Elvis Costello
Often the imagery helps to create the tone, or mood of a poem. We describe tone with words like: lighthearted, somber, suspenseful, introspective, etc.

The Raven

---Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door;
Only this, and nothing more."

What images can you pick out of this poem? What tone do they evoke?
Sometimes, in order to understand a poem, the reader needs to understand the history of the time period during which it was written. Sometimes it is important to know something about the poet in order to get the full impact of the poem’s meaning.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

--Walt Whitman

If the reader didn’t know this poem was written about Lincoln’s assassination, it wouldn’t make as much sense.
We analyze a poem to find the meaning.

We look at all of the parts to determine the whole.

We pick it apart to see what the poet has hidden for us.
We are trying to figure out the **THEME**

My trick:

Theme = The me(ssage)

What lesson, truth or message is the poet trying to impart to us? Usually it can be stated in one sentence. Theme is not the subject.

If you can point back to the poem and show where you got the theme, you cannot be wrong. However, some interpretations can be more right based on correct interpretation of symbolism, allusion or other parts of the poem.
I hear you asking, “Is there a specific strategy, maybe a clever acronym we can use to help analyze poetry, as we are not equipped to properly analyze poetry? This makes us sad.

Happily there is. It is called TPCASTT, and now you will learn it, or if you know it you will learn much more about it.
TPCASTT practice

• You will be asked to take notes on how to TPCASTT a poem. This is a method to thoroughly understand a poem.

• Then we will work through a poem together.
• **Title:** Does it mean anything?
• **Paraphrase:** Rewrite the poem in your own words.
• **Connotation:** Words with emotional meaning.
• **Attitude:** Find examples that illustrate the tone and mood of the poem
• **Shift:** Is there a change in tone or attitude?
• **Title:** Does the title mean anything else?
• **Theme:** What is the overall theme?
Don’t read the poem yet.
Just look at the title.

Title: Does it mean anything?

• Write your answer please.
• The word metaphor describes a comparison between 2 things. This poem is probably going to be a comparison.
Paraphrase: Rewrite the poem in your own words.

- Now you look at the poem.
- Go one idea at a time and just write it in your own words – this is translation to common language, not interpretation of significance.

- Wrong way
  - The beginning of life is like the morning where you can do anything.

- Right way
  - The morning time is like a blank sheet of paper.
**Metaphor**

Morning is
a new sheet of paper
for you to write on.

Whatever you want to say,
all day,
until night folds it up
and files it away.

The bright words and the dark words
are gone
until dawn
and a new day
to write on.

**Connotation: Words with emotional meaning.**

- Make a list of all the emotional words.
  - Morning
  - new
  - Whatever
  - want
  - all
  - day
  - night
  - folds
  - up
  - files
  - away
  - bright
  - dark
  - gone
  - dawn
  - new
Metaphor

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Whatever you want to say,
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Attitude: Emotional feeling of the poem – tone and attitude.
• Since most of your connotation words are positive, then it’s fair to say the tone or mood is also positive.
• Now try to specifically summarize the tone or mood. Pick a word or words that describes this tone or mood accurately. Be specific.
  – Wrong: the tone is good
  – Wrong: the tone is emotional.
  – Right: the tone is optimistic.
Metaphor

Morning is a new sheet of paper for you to write on.

Whatever you want to say, all day,

The bright words and the dark words are gone until dawn and a new day to write on.

Shift: Does it change feeling or emotion?

- Most poetry has a shift. This will normally contrast with the rest of the poem and help you to understand the meaning of the poem.
- Where is the shift in this poem?
- What does it accomplish?
  - It points out that the mood is not purely optimistic. We are limited in the amount of time we have each day and we can make bad decisions.
Metaphor

Morning is
a new sheet of paper
for you to write on.

Whatever you want to say,
all day,
until night folds it up
and files it away.

The bright words and the dark words
are gone
until dawn
and a new day
to write on.

Title: Does the title mean anything else?

• The title seems kind of simple doesn’t it. Almost every poem is a metaphor after all.
• Does the title mean anymore after reading the poem?
Metaphor

Morning is
a new sheet of paper
for you to write on.

Whatever you want to say,
all day,
until night folds it up
and files it away.

The bright words and the dark words
are gone
until dawn
and a new day
to write on.

Theme: What is the moral?

• A theme is an underlying message. It is not the topic! The theme has nothing to do with paper, dawn, or night.
• This is where you interpret the meaning of the poem.
• You good? You got this?
Sonnet

• Here are the rules for writing a sonnet:
• It must consist of 14 lines.
• It must be written in iambic pentameter (duh-DUH-duh-DUH-duh-DUH-duh-DUH-duh-DUH).
• It must be written in one of various standard rhyme schemes.
• If you're writing the most familiar kind of sonnet, the Shakespearean, the rhyme scheme is this:
Sonnet Cont.

- Format of a Sonnet:
- A
  B
  A
  B
- C
  D
  C
  D
- E
  F
  E
  F
- G
  G

- Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date. Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimmed; And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed; But thy eternal summer shall not fade, Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest, Nor shall death brag thou wanderest in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou growest. So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
Extended Metaphor

• A metaphor longer than a line.
• Example # 1

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages. At first the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms... - 'As You Like It' - William Shakespeare
Extended Metaphor Cont.

- Can You See the Pride In the Panther
  As he grows in splendor and grace
- Toppling obstacles placed in the way, of the progression of his race.

Can You See the Pride In the Panther
as she nurtures her young all alone
The seed must grow regardless of the fact that it is planted in stone.

- Can You See the Pride In the Panthers
  as they unify as one.
The flower blooms with brilliance, and outshines the rays of the sun.

- Tupac Shakur