

Poetry
Analysis

Digging Deeper Into Poetry

English 521
2009



What We're Looking For:

- When we analyze a poem, there are three main categories we examine:
 - Content
 - Style
 - Theme & Evaluation

Content:

CONTENT

- When we examine the content of a poem, we're looking for things like:
 - The reader's first impressions
 - What the poem may look like on its surface
 - An examination of the poet (or poetic voice)
 - The poem's context
 - An examination of the poem's title
 - Identification of conflicts within the poem
 - A discussion about tone and mood


Style:

STYLE

- Looking at a poem's style requires the reader to dig deeper than the surface and examine such things as:
 - The type of poem we're examining
 - The poem's diction (word choices)
 - Identification and examination of all its figures of speech
 - Identification of images and symbolism in the poem
 - The parts of the poem appealing to the reader's senses
 - The structure of the poem (if it has any structure, that is)

5

Theme & Evaluation:



- In the final part of the analysis, the reader offers his/her ideas about possible themes that are present in the poem.
- Also, the reader communicates his/her final thoughts about the poem in general and the poem's relationship to modern life.

6

Digging Deeper

What All That Stuff Actually Means

1. Content
2. Style
3. Theme & Evaluation



7

Analyzing Content

Digging Deeper Into Poetry




8

First Impressions




- After reading the poem for the first time, it is helpful to record your first impressions:
 - Interesting Words
 - Possible Subject
 - Your impressions will change as you re-read the poem
- You might begin by writing something like:

Upon first reading, a reader may be given the impression that Robert Frost is writing about walking through a woods on a nice fall day. He speaks of two roads and...

9


On the Surface



- This accompanies the first impressions part of your analysis.
- This is where the reader tells the audience what the poem appears to be about before he/she looks at the figures of speech and imagery.
 - Like the analysis a child might provide, not being aware of the deeper meaning most poems exhibit

10


Poet & Poetic Voice



- Before offering any sort of analysis, you must first find out a little bit about the poet who created the poem.
 - This requires a little bit of research.
- It is also important to remember that some poets don't write as themselves. They often adopt a persona to be the speaker (or voice) of the poem.
 - Often, the poetic voice could be expressing an emotion that the poet may or may not share.
- Who is the ADDRESSEE of the poem?
 - To whom is the speaker speaking?

11


Context



- This is where learning a little bit about the poet comes in very handy.
- What circumstances must have existed to make this poet create this poem?
 - Details about the poet's life.
 - What's happening in society (wars, marriage, etc) then.
 - Does the poem address a social, psychological, historical, or mythical phenomenon?

12

Title



- You have to assume that the poet chose the title of his/her poem after a lot of thought.
 - How does it fit?
 - Is it a good title to represent the poem?
 - How does it relate to the ideas in the poem?
 - Do you think it is an appropriate title?
 - Why do you think he/she decided to name the poem by this title?

13

Conflicts



- This may or not be present in the poem, but it is often central to many poems.
 - Must be identified if present.
 - Often, poems with an emotional theme are built around a conflict.
 - It is important to identify this conflict because it is the conflict in the poet's life that probably forced him/her to write the poem.
 - How do these conflicts help propel the poem forward?

14

Tone: All About the Poet



- Tone is the poet's attitude towards his/her subject.
 - Tone is projected through poetic voice.
 - It is created through diction (word choice), rhythm, rhyme, and use of imagery.
 - It may be mournful, angry, reflective, melancholy, joyful, bitter, ironic, etc. (Usually expressed as an adjective)
 - By picking up the tone of a poem, you'll be better able to understand its intended meaning.
- When discussing tone, it is important for you to find examples of lines/diction in the poem which support your choice.

15

Mood: All About You



- Mood is how the reader is supposed to feel after reading the poem. It describes the atmosphere the poem creates.
 - How do you think the poet wanted you to feel?
 - Chances are that a poet who uses a melancholy tone will create a bright and lively mood in the reader.
 - Choice of words and imagery are what create tone.
 - Again, mood is usually expressed as an adjective (angry, reflective, melancholy, bitter, excited, happy, etc.)
- Again, find examples of lines/diction in the poem which explain how this mood is created.

16

Analyzing Style

Digging Deeper Into Poetry




17

Type of Poem


 STYLE

- Includes Form
 - Popular poetry forms include:
 - Lyric (short and musical; most often rhymed)
 - Sonnet (14 lines with a definite rhyme scheme)
 - Ballad (a lyric poem which tells a story)
 - Ode (poem written in praise of something)
 - Epic (a long, heroic poem with elevated language)
 - Dramatic Monologue (a conversation)
 - Free Verse (no particular structure)
 - Elegy (like a eulogy, only in poem)

18

Diction


 STYLE

- This is the poet's word choice
 - Upon reading the poem, make sure to discover the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases, allusions, and other unfamiliar stuff.
 - This doesn't necessarily have to be part of your analysis, but it will definitely help your understanding.
 - Is the poem free of clichés?
 - Are the words concrete or abstract?
 - How does the diction contribute to or detract from the poem?
- Remember, you must comment on the diction and then offer examples to support your claims.

19

Figures of Speech


 STYLE

- The key to discussing and understanding poetry is in deciphering its figurative language, which includes:
 - Figures of speech (simile, metaphor, oxymoron, etc.)
- Does the poet use figurative language?
- Each must be identified and then explained.
 - Without an explanation of what the figure of speech means, all you have proven is that you can identify various figures of speech.
 - Tie them to the poem by telling what they mean, both literally and figuratively.

20

Imagery & Symbolism


 STYLE

- Are there concrete images that the poet wants the reader to see, hear, smell, touch, taste?
- What images does the poem evoke?
 - How are they evoked?
 - How do different images connect or contrast with one another?
 - Are there other aural (onomatopoeia, alliteration) and visual (achieved through simple description) details?

21

Structure

STYLE


- Structure usually applies to poems that must follow a certain structure like sonnets, limericks, haiku, etc.
 - The way the lines are organized and grouped.
 - Line length?
 - Rhyme, rhythm, and its division (or not) into stanzas.
 - Stanzas (line groupings)
 - Couplet (a pair of lines that rhyme)
 - Triplet (three rhyming lines)
 - Quatrain (four rhyming lines)
 - Rhyme Scheme (lines that rhyme with one another)
 - Rhythm (the existence of a regular beat – it can give the poem a feeling of energy and life; think of how rhythm enhances music).
- How does the structure enhance/take away from the piece?

22

Analyzing Theme & Evaluation

EVALUATION

Digging Deeper Into Poetry



23

Theme & Evaluation

EVALUATION


- Theme
 - Does this poem have an underlying message?
 - Does this poem try to tell us something about life, humanity, or something else?
 - Is the poem trying to teach the reader a lesson of some sort?
- Evaluation
 - Does the poet succeed in recreating his/her experiences within the reader? How?
 - Is the experience intensely felt by the reader?
 - Does the poem succeed in sharpening the reader's awareness of something significant?

24

Theme & Evaluation:

EVALUATION

- In the final part of the analysis, the reader offers his/her final thoughts about the poem in general.
 - An educated guess about the poem's theme
 - The reader's judgment of the poem
 - You decide whether the poet achieved his/her purpose
 - Discussion of how the poem's theme relates to present-day life and/or experiences.
 - Of the reader
 - Of society in general



Explication: A Paper About a Poem



- Poems must be chosen from Inside Poetry texts.
- Explications must include a formal cover page.
- When researching the poet, make note of websites/books so you can include a References page at the end of your paper.
- Each of the categories discussed must appear in the paper.
- Go through the poem line by line - don't leave anything without analysis.
- This is a formal paper. You don't write using 'I'. Instead, when commenting on the poem, you should say 'the reader' or 'one'.
- Remember, you are making judgments about this poem. Any time you make a judgment, you should support yourself with evidence (lines/phrases) from the poem itself.
- Most explications fall in the 700 - 1000 word range.
- Peer-revision day is important. Don't miss it! (also worth 4 points)