

Title: Examine the title before reading the poem. Sometimes the title will give you a clue about the content of the poem. In some cases, the title will give you crucial information that will help you understand a major idea within the poem.

Paraphrase: Paraphrase the literal action within the poem. At this point, resist the urge to jump to interpretation. A failure to understand what happens literally inevitably leads to an interpretive misreading.

Speaker: Who is the speaker in this poem? Remember to always distinguish speaker from the poet. In some cases they might be the same, but the speaker and the poet can be entirely different.

Figurative Language: Examine the poem for language that is not used literally. This would include, but is not limited to, literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, metaphor, litotes, allusion, and sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, rhyme).

Attitude (Tone): Tone means the speaker's attitude towards the subject of the poem. This means that you must discern the subject of the poem. Also keep in mind the speaker's attitude toward self and other characters, as well as other character's attitudes.

Shifts: Note shifts in speaker and attitude. Shifts can be indicated in a number of ways including the occasion of the poem (time and place), key turn words, punctuation, stanza divisions, changes in line of stanza length, and anything else that indicates that something has changed or a question is being answered.

Title: Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

Theme: First list what the poem is about (subject); then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects (theme). Remember, theme must be expressed as a complete sentence.