

TPCASTT

POEM ANALYSIS METHOD

Poems can be very difficult to interpret because a lot of what they have to say is not written but is implied. A major problem that students have with interpreting poetry is that they read the poem once, pick out a detail or two and then jump to a conclusion, often the wrong conclusion. To avoid this pitfall, it is important to gather significant data and try out different hypotheses before drawing a conclusive interpretation. These steps, sort of like the scientific method, comprise a safe way to avoid serious misinterpretations.

Title

Ponder the title before reading the poem. Make up questions about the title. There are two kinds of titles: interactive titles and naming titles. Interactive titles have some sort of interplay with the poem itself and can affect its meaning. Naming titles may give less crucial information. If a poem lacks a title, you can do this step with the first line of the poem or skip it.

Paraphrase

Translate the poem into your own words. Find synonyms for every possible word. Summarizing is NOT paraphrasing.

Connotation

Contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Identify the figurative language (especially simile, metaphor, and personification), symbolism, diction, point of view, and sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, and rhyme. Do DIDLS.

Attitude

After identifying a subject/topic of the poem, figure out how the speaker (and/or the poet) feels about it. Examine diction, images, and details.

Shifts

Note transitions in the poem, shifts in subject, attitude, mood or motif. Trace the changing feelings of the speaker from beginning to end, paying close attention to the conclusion. Watch for the following: key words (although, but, however, etc), punctuation, stanza divisions, changes in line of stanza length, irony, effect of structure on meaning, changes in sound, changes in diction (slang to formal).

Title

Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level. Figure out how the title illuminates the poem. Remember, a "naming title" may not mean much.

Theme

Steps in recognizing theme: a) summarize the "plot," b) list the subject(s) of the poem, c) determine what the poet is saying about each subject. Write a complete sentence stating what the poet is saying.