

Useful method to teach poetry.

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Structure
Meaning
Imagery
Language
Effect

When writing about poetry we should comment on all of the above at some point in the essay.

Structure

The structure refers to the physical and grammatical composition of the poem. For this element, students should consider the following for their poetry analysis:

- number of verses/stanzas
- comparative length of verses/stanzas (regular or irregular)
- line length
- rhyme scheme
- repetition, including refrains
- enjambment
- sentence structure and grammar
- punctuation or lack of it
- Significance of title.
- Pauses /caesura

Meaning

In identifying the meaning, students should be able to articulate the basic subject of a poem along with its deeper significance. In order to effectively capture meaning, a reader must also be able to accurately identify a poem's message or theme. Often this requires working out a poem's deeper, figurative meaning. Basically, what is the poet trying to say?

Imagery

Imagery refers to language that appeals to one of the five senses - touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. Imagery helps strengthen a writer's description by providing physical details that enable the reader to better imagine the scene or understand the speaker's feelings. Imagery can contain [figurative language](#), but does not have to.

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Figurative language means using figures of speech to be more effective, persuasive and impactful. Figures of speech such as metaphors, similes and allusions go beyond the literal meanings of words to give readers new insights.

By adding imagery to a particular object, person, or scene, the writer heightens the importance of that detail and helps add negative or positive value to it.

Imagery can include similes, metaphors etc.

Language

Language refers to a writer's diction, or word choice. Use of figurative language should be noted here and interpreted, along with sound devices, repetition, the speaker's dialect, and particularly significant words. Students may find the questions below useful when analysing poetic language.

- Does the poem contain metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole or other figurative language?
- Does the poem play with sound using alliteration, assonance, repetition, or rhyme?
- Are there any words that are particularly sophisticated or especially basic? Does the rhyme, for example, depend on words like “hog” and “dog” or “absolution” and “circumlocution”?
- Does the poem contain formal or informal dialect? Does the speaker seem to come from a particular region, country, or cultural background?
- Are there any interesting choices of verbs, vocabulary etc.?
- Has ambiguity been used deliberately for effect?

Effect

In determining a poem's effect, readers can include their initial reactions. How do they feel after reading it? What is the mood of the poem? The readers should also review this element after studying the other four (SMIL). In this way, students can consider the effect of the poem's structure, imagery, language, and message as they work together.

How to use SMILE when writing essays about poetry:

Make sure you know what SMILE stands for and learn how to use this simple mnemonic to help you to write effectively about poems. You should write at least a paragraph about SMI and L and the E must be discussed in every paragraph at some point.

You can also include your own views and feelings about the poem but they need to link to the focus of the question.