

Tips for Reading and Writing Poetry

SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- When approaching a poem, you need to remember that poetry is a very concentrated form of language. This concentration is what gives poetry its sense of ambiguity, vigor, and mystery.
- Poetry is not like other forms of writing, such as journalism, where the intent is to inform quickly and briefly. You should not expect to fully understand a poem after reading it only once.
- When you are reading a poem, you need to consider both **what** a poem is saying and **how** it is being said.

FIRST READING

- Read the poem straight through with no particular expectations; read open-mindedly.
- Let yourself experience whatever you find, without worrying just yet about the large general and important ideas the poem contains (if indeed it contains any).
- Don't dwell on a troublesome word or difficult passage--just push on.

SECOND READING

- Read for the exact sense of all the words; if there are words you don't understand, look them up in a dictionary.
- Dwell on any difficult part as long as you need to.
- If you read the poem silently to yourself, sound its words in your mind. Better still, read the poem aloud, or hear someone else read it.--You may discover meaning you didn't perceive in it before.

SUBSEQUENT READINGS

- Remember that the writing of poetry is an intentional act. Concentrate on the form of the poem, the words that the writer chose, and the poetic devices that

s/he employed. They are all clues to the meaning of the poem. As you read, mark all of the clues that you can find.

- Try to paraphrase the poem as a whole. Come to a conclusion about the overall subject and theme of the piece.
- If you cannot paraphrase the entire poem, then paraphrase each sentence or line. Put your paraphrases together to come to a conclusion about the overall meaning of the poem

A S H O R T I N D E X O F P O E T I C T E R M S

ABSTRACTION--Intangible concept. ie. "Beautiful" (which means something different to everyone).

ALLITERATION--The repetition of initial identical consonant sounds. ie. "foam flew forward."

ALLUSION--Indirect reference to any person, place, or thing--fictitious, historical, or actual.

ASSONANCE--Repetition of vowel sounds. ie. "lake" and "fade."

CACOPHONY--Harsh or discordant sounds.

CAESURA--A pause or break in a line of verse.

CONCRETE--Diction pertaining to particular (tangible) objects.

CONNOTATION--The associations or suggested meanings of a word (connotations give you clues to the tone).

CONSONANCE--Words with the same beginning and ending consonant sounds but a different vowel. ie. "chitter, chatter."

COUPLET--A two line stanza.

DENOTATION--Dictionary definition of a word.

DICTION--Choice of words.

END RHYME--Rhyme at the ends of lines in a poem.

END-STOPPED--Lines in which both the grammatical structure and the idea reach completion at the end.

ENJAMBEMENT--The continuation of the idea and grammatical construction of a line onto the next line.

EUPHONY--Sounds that work together to form a pleasing effect.

EXPLICATION--An analysis of meanings, relationships, and ambiguities of words and images.

FOOT--The unit of rhythm in verse. Iamb 'U', Trochee 'U', Anapest 'UU', Dactyl 'UU', Spondee "

FREE VERSE--Poetry which uses an open form.

HYPERBOLE--Overstatement.

IMAGERY--The use of visual, auditory, or tactile images to evoke sensations in the reader.

INTERNAL RHYME--Rhyme that occurs some place before the last syllables of a line.

IRONY--Occurs whenever words say one thing but mean something else, usually the opposite.

LEVELS OF DICTION-- The use of vulgate, colloquial, general English, or formal English.

LYRIC--A short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker.

METAPHOR--A statement that one thing is something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not. ie. "Love is a rose."

METER--The recurrence in poetry of a rhythmic pattern.

METONOMY--The name of a thing is substituted for that of another closely associated with it.

NARRATIVE POEM--A poem that tells a story.

ONOMATOPOEIA--Words that by their sounds suggest their meaning. ie. "hiss." "buzz," or "sizzle."

PARABLE--An illustrative story teaching a lesson.

PARADOX--A statement that although seemingly contradictory or absurd may actually be well founded or true.

PERSONA--The "speaker" of a poem through whom the narrative is told.

PERSONIFICATION--Endowing animals, ideas, abstractions, and inanimate objects with human characteristics.

QUATRAIN--A four line stanza.

SARCASM--A statement that is bitter, heavy-handed, and mocking.

SIMILE--A comparison using "like" or "as."

SLANT RHYME--Near rhyme. ie. rhyming "sun" with "bone, moon, rain, green, gone, or thin."

STANZA--A group of lines in a poem (a unit like a prose paragraph).

SYNECDOCHE--Part of a thing stands for the whole or vice versa. ie. "She lent a hand."

SUBJECT--Main topic (whatever the poem is about--literally). The subject should not be confused with the theme.

THEME--Central thought of the poem.