

Reading a Poem (From *Writers, INC*)¹

A poet once said that “a poem should not mean, but be.” That may sound a bit odd at first, but if you think about it, it just might point you in the right direction when it comes to reading a poem. Maybe thinking about what a poem “is” and what it “does” might be a better way to approach a poem than regarding it as a puzzle or riddle to be solved for some concealed “meaning.”

It might also help to remember that poems don’t jump fully formed into a poet’s mind. Poems (at least most of them) are created gradually. A poet may work on a poem for days or weeks before it is “complete.” Just as the creation of a poem comes through gradual change and growth, the reading of a poem should also be viewed as a process. You shouldn’t expect to grasp everything a poem has to offer in one reading, especially if the poem is lengthy or complex. Below are some strategies to help get you started in the process.

First Reading

- Read the poem all the way through at your normal reading speed
- Try to gain an overall impression of the poem. (Don’t stop to analyze individual lines or sections)
- Respond by jotting down your immediate reaction to the entire poem. (Basically, this reaction will be your thoughts or first feelings).

Second Reading

- Read the poem once again—out loud, if possible. (Pay attention to the “sound effects” of the poem—both of individual words and overall)
- Read slowly and carefully—word by word, syllable by syllable—observing the punctuation, spacing, and special treatment of words and syllables
- Note examples of sound devices in the poem—alliteration, assonance, rhyme etc. (This will help you understand the proper phrasing and rhythm of the poem).

Third Reading

- Try to identify the type/genre of poem you’re reading. (Does this poem follow the usual pattern of that particular type? If not, why not?)
- Determine the literal sense of the poem. (What is the poem about? What does the poem seem to say about its subject?)
- Look carefully for figurative devices in the poem. (How do these devices—metaphors, similes, personification, symbols etc.—support the literal level of the poem?)

Putting it all Together

- Give the poem as many additional readings as necessary
- Do a 10-minute free writing. Write down everything you can about the poem. (Relate what you’ve read to what you know or have experienced).

¹ Sebranek, Patrick, Verne Meyer, and Dave Kemper. *Writers Inc.* Burlington, WI: Write Source Educational Pub. House, 1992. Print.

Poetry Terms

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in words such as “rough and ready.” An example of alliteration (from “Runaway Warming” by Anne-Marie Omen) is underlined below:

“Our gang paces the pier like an old myth . . .”

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds without the repetition of consonants.

“My words like silent rain drops fell . . .” —Paul Simon, “Sounds of Silence”

Ballad is a poem in verse form that tells a story.

Blank verse is an unrhymed form of poetry that normally consists of ten syllables in which every other syllable, beginning with the second, is stressed. Since blank verse is often used in very long poems, it may depart from the strict pattern from time to time.

Caesura is a pause or sudden break in a line of poetry.

Canto is a main division of a long poem.

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds. Although it is similar to alliteration, consonance is not limited to the first letters of words:

“ . . . and high school girls with clear skin smiles . . . ”
—Janis Ian, “At Seventeen”

Couplet is two lines of verse the same length that usually rhyme.

End rhyme is the rhyming of words that appear at the ends of two or more lines of poetry.

Enjambment is the running over of a sentence or thought from one line to another.

Foot is the smallest repeated pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line. (See “Verse.”)

Iambic: an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable (repeat)

Anapestic: two unstressed followed by a stressed syllable (interrupt)

Trochaic: a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable (older)

Dactylic: a stressed followed by two unstressed syllables (openly)

Spontalic: two stressed syllables (heartbreak)

Pyrrhic: two unstressed syllables (Pyrrhic seldom appears by itself)

Free verse is poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme.

Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry that has three lines; the first line has five syllables, the second has seven syllables, and the third has five syllables. The subject of the haiku has traditionally been nature, as in the following poem:

Behind me the moon
Brushes shadows of pine trees
Lightly on the floor.

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Heroic couplet (closed couplet) consists of two successive rh. contain a complete thought.

Internal rhyme occurs when the rhyming words appear in poetry: “You break my eyes with a look that buys sweet cake.”

Lyric is a short verse that is intended to express the emotion quite often these lyrics are set to music.

Meter is the patterned repetition of stressed and unstressed line of poetry.

Onomatopoeia is the use of a word whose sound suggests its *clang, buzz, and tuang*.

Refrain is the repetition of a line or phrase of a poem at regular ally at the end of each stanza. A song’s refrain may be called

Repetition is the repeating of a word or phrase within a poem create a sense of rhythm: “His laugh, his dare, his shrug / sag ghost

Rhyme is the similarity or likeness of sound existing between *Sat* and *cut* are perfect rhymes because the vowel and final consonant are exactly the same.

Rhymed verse is verse with end rhyme; it usually has regular

Rhythm is the ordered or free occurrences of sound in poetry. (ular rhythm is called meter. Free occurrence of sound is called

Sonnet is a poem consisting of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter are two popular forms of the sonnet, the Italian (or Petrarch Shakespearean (or English).

Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet has two parts: an octave (eight tet (six lines), usually rhyming abbaabba, cdecde. Often a quatrain the octave and answered in the sestet.

Shakespearean (English or Elizabethan) sonnet consists of three quatrains and a final rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef ghgh. Usually, the question or theme is set forth in the quatrains which resolution appears in the final couplet.

Stanza is a division of poetry named for the number of lines it contains.

Couplet: two-line stanza

Triplet: three-line stanza

Quatrain: four-line stanza

Quintet: five-line stanza

Verse is a metric line of poetry. It is named according to the kind of feet composing it: iambic pentameter, anapestic tetrameter . . .

Monometer: one foot

Dimeter: two feet

Trimeter: three feet

Tetrameter: four feet

Pentameter: five feet

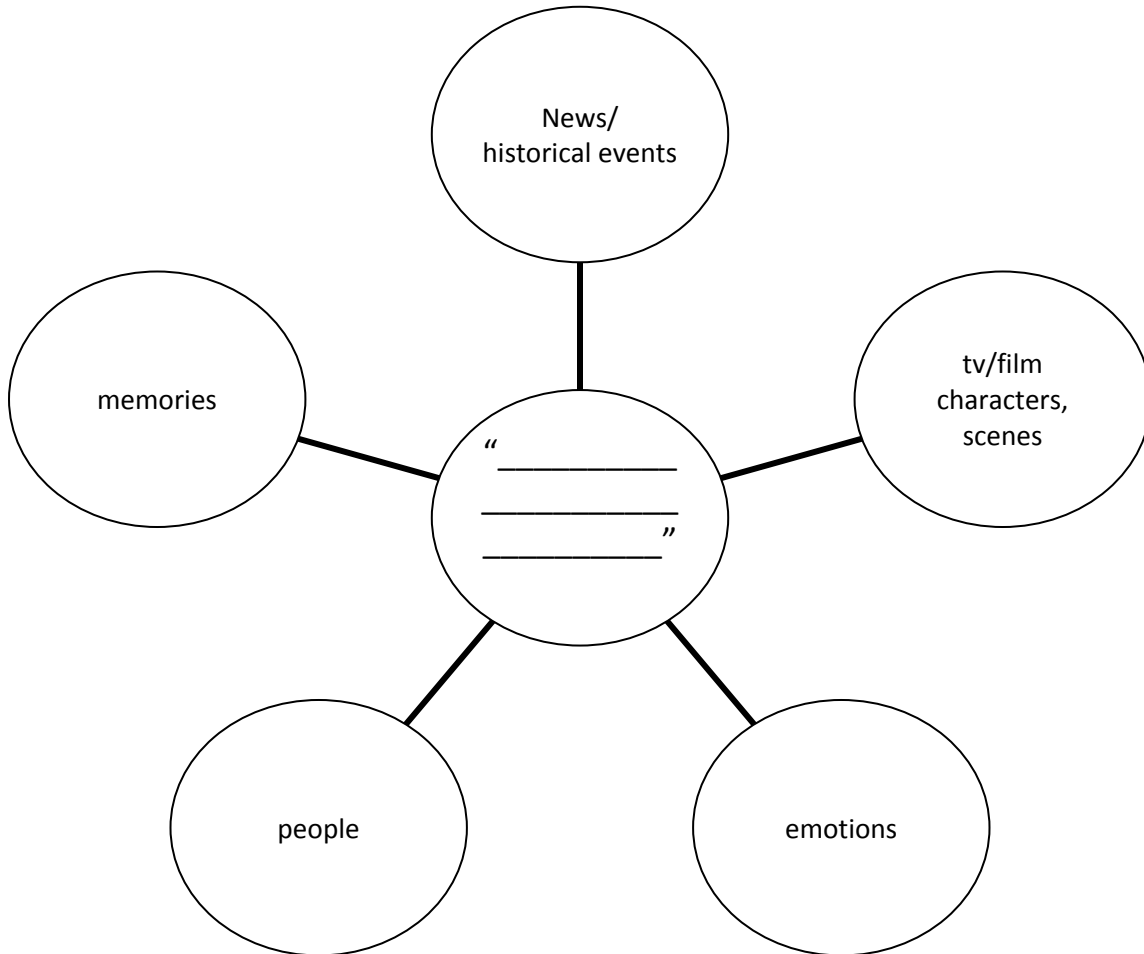
Hexameter: six feet

Heptameter: seven feet

Octometer: eight feet

Reading a Poem: _____ <insert poem title>
Refer to your “Reading a Poem” package

Reading #1: Focus on initial thoughts. Listen to the song and note your: overall impressions, feelings, thoughts, immediate reactions. Feel free to add your own branches and EXPAND the mind map.



Reading #2: Focus on SOUND DEVICES

Choose from this list of terms to explain these quotations:

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Alliteration | | | |
| Iambic Pentameter | Meter | Metrical feet | Onomatopoeia |
| Rhyme | Rhythm | Rhyme Scheme | |
| End-rhyme | Rhyming couplet | | |

Here's a list of two quotations from the poem (two are provided). How does each quotation build on the ideas you have outlined in Reading #1? You may decide on a theme now or later.

Find one of your own.

1. " _____ " (_____) ←line #s

poet device: _____ ; _____

explanation: _____

2. " _____ " (_____)

poet device: _____ ;

explanation: _____

3. Quotation of your choice that focuses on SOUND

" _____ " (_____) ←line #s

poet device: _____

explanation: _____

Reading #3: Focus on type of poem (form) or figurative meaning

_____ <poet’s name> is writing this piece in the form of a/an _____.

(defined as: _____)

Choose from this list of terms to explain these quotations:

Fm = form (looking at structure of poem)

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Colloquial Language (Slang) | Allusion | Analogy | Context |
| Couplet (fm) | Ballad (fm) | Comparison | Formal language |
| Dialogue | Subtext | Denotation/Connotation | Hyperbole |
| Free verse (fm) | Diction/Vocabulary | Symbol | Irony |
| Idiom | Figurative Language | Haiku (fm) | Simile |
| Juxtaposition (fm) | Theme | Formal Language | Oxymoron |
| Motif | Imagery (5 types) | Metaphor | Proverb |
| Paradox | Lyric Poem (fm) | Personification | Tone |
| Pun | Parody | Simile | Satire |
| | Refrain (fm) | Stanza (fm) | |
| | Sonnet (fm) | | |

How does this quotation build on the ideas you have outlined in Reading #1 and #2?

Here’s a list of two quotations from the poem (two are provided). Find one of your own.

#1. “ _____ ” (_____) ← line #s

poet device: _____

explanation: _____

#2. “ _____ ” (_____) ← line #s

poet device: _____

Imagery: _____

#3. Quotation of your choice that focuses on FIGURATIVE MEANING

poet device: _____

explanation: _____
