

Key Strategies for determining the meaning of a poem

1. Pay attention to form. The form of a poem is the physical arrangement of the words on a page. This includes the way lines are placed, their grouping, and their length.
 - Look at the poem before you read it.
 - Examine whether the lines and stanzas form a regular pattern. If not, determine why.
 - Listen for rhythm as you read the poem aloud.
 - Pause where punctuation marks appear, not where the line ends. Stopping at appropriate spots helps clarify meaning.
 2. Pay attention to sound devices. Skilled poets use sound devices for a reason, usually to draw attention to major points.
 - Read the poem aloud several times.
 - Identify the sound devices and determine why the poet chose them.
 - Determine the rhyme scheme.
 - Look for near rhyme. Poets often use near rhyme to make the reader focus on an important word.
 - Determine the purpose of the sound.
 3. Look for figurative language. Because poets have fewer words with which to work, they must use them sparingly. Figurative language allows them to cover much with little.
 - Visualize figurative language.
 - Analyze the meaning of each metaphor or simile.
 4. [Look at the title](#). Determine if the title contributes any special meaning to the poem.
 5. Make connections. Personalizing poetry makes it meaningful.
 6. [Summarize](#) the poem's meaning.
- Modeling in the classroom means vocalizing a thinking process.
 - Begin by reading a segment of text aloud as students follow along.
 - In everyday language, reason aloud. Verbalize the steps expert readers follow to solve a reading problem or analyze a text.
 - Encourage students to apply similar procedures as they read.

I will use our good friend William Shakespeare to illustrate:

I read: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet." (*Romeo and Juliet* II, ii,

- I say: Gee, that line sounds familiar. I've heard it before. I wonder what it means? "A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet." I guess what Juliet is saying in this passage is it doesn't matter what you call a rose, it still smells really good. Is that true? I wonder. I don't think it's true. In fact, I bet if you held a rose up to the average person's nose and said, "Here. Smell poop" that it would not smell as sweet. In fact, I bet if you simply changed the smooth Latin consonant sounds to rough Anglo-Saxon consonants--for example, call a rose a "clackakirk bush"-- it would lose its olfactory pleasantness. What do you guys think?

Sound of Crickets.

I continue: I wonder what this romantic insight by Juliet adds to the play. I think what she is saying is "it doesn't matter what Romeo's last name is. He's hot. In fact, before I realized he was a Montague, I really wanted to dance with him. Names don't matter!"

I could go on and on, but you get the point.

Student Responsibilities

To complete the modeling process, have students repeat the steps. We'll continue with our *Romeo and Juliet* example.

Little Sally reads: "A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet."

Awkward Silence (Now's a good time for encouragement).

Little Sally says: Well. Ummmm. Ummmm. I think a rose would actually smell better if you called it raw sewage because if you think you're about to smell raw sewage then you're expecting a really horrible smell but you get a sweet fragrance instead. So by contrast the rose is the best smelling rose ever made. The fact that Juliet has fallen in love with the enemy makes the romance even hotter than before because we all know when something is forbidden it seems more attractive (at this point, every guy in the room who Sally's parents would not approve of start to pay attention).

Final Words on Modeling

Modeling takes time. However, it will [inspire students](#) to read on their own, which in the long run will [save time](#).