

How to Read a Poem

1. Look at the poem's title. What might this poem be about?
2. Read the poem aloud without trying to understand it.
3. Read it again for understanding. Start with what you know. Underline the parts you do not understand. Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary.
4. Now read the poem as if it were prose. Rearrange words to more normal prose order.
5. Write a short first impression of the poem. What do you notice about the poem so far? What do you think the poem is about?
6. Look for patterns. Watch for repeated, interesting or unfamiliar use of language, imagery, sound, color or arrangement. What might the poet be trying to do with these patterns?
7. Look for changes within the poem—in tone, focus, narrator, structure, voice, patterns. What has changed and what does the change mean?
8. Who is speaking in the poem? What does the poem tell you about him or her?
9. Re-read the poem aloud from start to finish. Circle those portions you still do not understand.
10. Explain to someone else what you think the poem means.
11. Find the crucial moments in the poem. Look for words like “but” or “yet.” Such words often act like hinges to swing the poem in a different direction. Pay attention to breaks between stanzas or between lines.
12. Did the poet use a specific form, such as a sonnet or an ode? Did the poet use specific poetic devices such as assonance, alliteration, symbols, metaphors or allusions? How does the poet use capitalization and punctuation?
13. Read the poem aloud again. Return to the title and ask yourself what the poem is about and how it relates to the title.

P.A.S.S.: Grade 2 Reading—3.1; 5.2a; 6.1,3. Grade 3 Reading—2.1,3; 4.1ab,2a; 5.1a,3. Grade 4 Reading—4.1,4b; 4.1b,3ab. Grade 5 Reading—1.1b,4b; 3.1a,2a,4a; 4.1ab,3abc. Grade 6 Reading—1.1b,3b; 3.1a,2a; 4.1a,3abcd. Grade 7 Reading—1.13abcd; 3.2a; 4.1a,3abc. Grade 8 Reading—1.1,3abcd; 3.2a; 4.1a,3abc

Poetry Terms

alliteration—the repetition of the initial letter or sound in two or more words in a line of verse

allusion—a reference to the person, event, or work outside the poem or literary piece

anapestic (anapest)—a metrical foot containing three syllables. The first two are unstressed, while the last is stressed

assonance—the repetition of similar vowel sounds
ballad

blank verse—lines of iambic pentameter without end rhyme

caesura (pause)—a pause for a beat in the rhythm of the verse (often indicated by a line break or a mark of punctuation)

couplet—a pair of lines, usually rhymed

dactylic (dactyl)—a metrical foot containing three syllables. The first is stressed, while the last two are unstressed

diction—choice of words especially with regard to correctness, clearness, or effectiveness

end rhyme—a rhyme in which the last word at the end of each verse is the word that rhymes

enjambment—the running over of a sentence from one verse or couplet into another so that closely related words fall in different lines

epic—a long, often book-length, narrative in verse form that retells the heroic journey of a single person, or group of persons. Elements that typically distinguish epics include superhuman deeds, fabulous adventures, highly stylized language, and a blending of lyrical and dramatic traditions.

foot—a unit of a meter. The basic types of metrical feet are determined by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables.

free verse—lines that do not have a regular meter and do not contain

iambic (iamb)—a metrical foot containing two syllables. The first is unstressed, while the second is stressed.

iambic pentameter—a traditional form of rising meter consisting of lines containing five iambic feet (and, thus, ten syllables)

imagery—word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory)

limerick—five-line nonsense poem with an anapestic meter. The rhyme scheme is usually a-a-b-b-a. The first, second and fifth lines have three stresses, and the third and fourth have two stresses.

lyric—the words of a song

metaphor—comparison between essentially unlike things without using words OR application of a name or description to something to which it is not literally applicable

meter—the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables established in a line of poetry

ode—a formal address to an event, a person, or a thing not present

onomatopoeia—the use of a word to represent or imitate natural sounds (buzz, crunch, tinkle, gurgle, sizzle, hiss)

personification—giving human characteristics to inanimate objects, ideas or animals

poetry—a patterned form of verbal or written expression of ideas in concentrated, imaginative and rhythmical terms

quatrain—four-line stanza or grouping of four lines of verse

repetition—the act or an instance of repeating or being repeated

rhyme—the similarity or likeness of sound existing between two words.

rhyme scheme—the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or a poem

rhymed verse—verse with end rhyme, usually with a regular meter.

rising meter—meter containing metrical feet that move from unstressed to stressed syllables

rhythm—an ordered recurrent alternation of strong and weak elements in the flow of sound and silence in speech

simile—comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as "like," "as," or "as though"

sonnet—fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a prescribed rhyme scheme; its subject is traditionally that of love

stanza—unit of a poem often repeated in the same form throughout a poem; a unit of poetic lines ("verse paragraph")

stress—greater amount of force used to pronounce one syllable over another

symbol—a word or image that signifies something other than what is literally represented.

theme—a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation

tone—style or manner of expression in speaking or writing

trochaic (trochee)—a metrical foot containing two syllable. The first is stressed, while the second is unstressed.

verse—a line of metrical writing