

## How to Analyze a Poem

1. After you **read the poem several times**, start with the literal meaning of the words. Who is speaking? To whom? What is the situation or setting? Who are the people involved? What events take place? **Look up any unfamiliar words in the dictionary.**
2. Pay attention to the **title**. Does it give you a hint or clue about the deeper meaning of the poem?
3. Look at the **form** of the poem-its shape on the page. Is it fairly structured, with uniform stanzas (stanzas are to poems what paragraphs are to prose) and lines or is it written more freely, with irregular lines?
4. Listen to the **sound** of the poem. Is there a regular rhyme pattern? What about the rhythm: are the words choppy, or does the poem flow in long phrases? How does the sound of the poem affect its meaning?
5. Pay special attention to **metaphors and similes**. If the poem has compared two unlike things, explain why he/she thinks they are similar.
6. Consider the **tone and mood** of the poem. Which words in the poem carry the strongest emotional **connotations**? Think beyond general categories of happy and sad. Is the mood angry, playful, lonely, joyful, desperate? Some combination of conflicting emotions?
7. Remember that the poet may leave some aspects of his/her story unexplained. It is not the necessary to fill in all the gaps in a poem. The poet probably included these ambiguities on purpose. See if you can figure out why.
8. You can conclude your analysis with your interpretation of the author's main point. Why did he/she write this? What is he/she trying to say?