

POETRY DETAILS WORKSHEET

This worksheet presses you to consider how language, especially in poetry, is not a transparent medium for communication. Complete every section of this worksheet (a digital copy was sent to your email) with as much attention to detail as possible! You can't be *wrong* in this worksheet; you can only be *incomplete*. So throw all of your formal-device spaghetti at the wall, and see what sticks...

FIRST: RETYPE THE ENTIRE POEM, AND TRY TO MAKE IT APPEAR EXACTLY AS IT APPEARS IN YOUR SOURCE.

1. Look at your poem, line by line, then stanza by stanza, and then as a whole.

List any punctuation marks that strike you as worth noting (i.e., used in a way contrary to typical grammatical usage, or used in a way that stands out?)?	
Is the poem end-stopped or enjambed, or both? Which lines are which? Does there seem to be a pattern to which lines are enjambed and which aren't?	
Are there stanza breaks? If so, what seems to determine the size of a stanza?	
Is there a recognizable logic to the poem's form (is it a sonnet? A villanelle? A Sestina?) If there is, are there any moments that violate the rules of this form?	
Does anything else about the poem stand out, visually? How does it sit on the page and negotiate the whitespace around and within it?	

2. Read your poem out loud, and listen for how it sounds.

Is there a rhyme scheme? Is it consistent?	
Is there any alliteration that stands out? Consonance or assonance? Where?	
Are there any conspicuous pauses (caesurae)? Where? Are there lines that feel like they run on too long?	
Are there moments in the poem that are hard to say out loud? What makes them difficult to say?	

3. Now (finally) consider the actual words of the poem.

Are there any repeated words or phrases? List all of them (aside from articles like “a” and “the”)	
Are there any heteronyms (words that have the same spelling but different meanings/sounds)? Homophones (words that look different but sound the same)?	
Are there any prominent antonyms (opposites—light/dark, etc.) used within the poem?	
Can any of the words used mean more than one thing—i.e., are there any potential puns?	
What verbs stand out to you? Do the verbs share anything in common (i.e., are they related to particular activities/ environments/ actions)? What tense (or tenses) is the poem written in?	
Who seems to be the speaker of the poem, and what is the scenario or experience they are describing?	

4. Think about whether the poem is presenting ideas literally or whether it is trying to disclose something indirectly or figuratively.

Are there any metaphors (a comparison substituting one idea for another)? What are the tenors and vehicles of these metaphors?	
Similes (comparisons using like/as)?	
Personification?	
Metonymy (invoking something by means of an idea that is associated with it)?	

5. Consider whether ideas presented by the poem are invoking cultural norms/assumptions

Are there any gendered objects/ideas in the poem? Are they stereotypical?	
Is there any slang or jargon (language specific to a style of discourse i.e., legal language, or philosophical terms) used?	
Does the poem make reference to any specific people, places, or historical events (directly or indirectly)?	

6. Reread the poem as you might read a newspaper article or email (i.e., as any piece of communication). Then, get *creative* and *imaginative* as you grasp toward an *interpretation*.

-What seems to be the “gist” of the poem? What topics/conflicts/ideas/relationships does it seem to consider? Paraphrase the poem in ONE OR TWO SENTENCES.

-Select lines from the poem that you think capture the tensions and agreements between the formal features of the poem and its “gist.” Which line(s) are *representative* of the poem as a whole? Why and how?

Ultimately, it’s up to you to decide how the features of this line, and of the poem as a whole, intersect with the poem’s theme or topic. How do the patterns and features (textual, sonic, figurative) impact the way you understand the poem’s primary themes or concerns? The “meaning” you derive from the poem (i.e., your *interpretation*) will come from how the way the poem is put together impacts the way you understand its ostensible topic.

Remember:

Close-reading begins with a continual movement between the local and the global, the micro and the macro. It asks you to think both about *specific, concrete* features as well as the broader ideas presented. It’s left for you to figure out (creatively and imaginatively) how any given poem can ultimately be *about* the tensions and agreements between its own way of saying something and what it apparently has to say. Close-reading culminates in the act of sharing (usually in the form of writing!) your sense of the meaning generated by the intersections of “form” and “content.” The best way to do this is to *show the reader* what patterns of meaning you saw in the poem and how you interpreted them. In your writing, show (i.e., quote) them the features of language that were crucial to the development of your interpretation, explain why you interpret it this way, and string these moments together so that the conclusions you reached about the poem’s meaning can be retraced by your reader.