

Reading and Annotating

Poetry

Analyze and understand writing where structure is as important as language.

Poems function differently than prose, so you need to read them differently: more rounds of reading and more intensive annotation.

1 st Read	Give the Poem Some Breathing Room <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the poem without any expectations. Just enjoy it. If you can, read it out loud. Jot a note on the poem's narrative: who is the speaker, and what are they speaking about?
2 nd Read	Read for Literal Meaning Reread each stanza and determine what the speaker is literally discussing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mark up the title Write notes that answer the questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is literally happening in the poem? What is the speaker discussing/describing? Identify the speaker if you can. Reread the last stanza and jot a note on its tone. Make a hypothesis about the poem's theme.
3 rd Read	Read for Language and Figurative Meaning Underline figurative language that might suggest the poem's subtext (its implied meaning). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jot a quick note about author's purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similes – comparisons using like or as Metaphors – direct comparisons between two things Diction – word choice (multiple meanings, repeated usage, charged connotations, unexpected usage, repeated usage, or diction used in figurative language) Imagery – language that conjures any of the five senses Symbolism – objects that may represent abstract ideas Refine your hypothesis about the poem's theme.
4 th Read [Advanced]	Read for Structure and Sound [advanced] Once you have a starting hypothesis, examine and take notes on the poem's structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure – Note how the poem is organized and why the author may have made these choices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form – What is the genre of the poem? Does the form connect to its meaning? Organization – Is the poem split into sections by stanzas or ideas? Why? Enjambment – where does the author split lines? Splitting a line places emphasis on the final word in it. Why were these words important? Sound – Note the techniques that affect the way the poem sounds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhyme – if rhyme is used, what words rhyme? Why might the author have paired these? Rhythm – is there a rhythm, a beat, to the lines? What words are emphasized as a result? Cadence – Does the author link words by repeating vowel sounds (assonance) or consonant sounds (consonance, alliteration)? What is the effect? Patterns – does the author establish a pattern through alliteration or repetition? If so, what is linked? If the pattern is broken, why? Refine your hypothesis about the poem's theme.
Theme Note	At the End of the Poem, Generate an End Note on the Possible Theme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review your annotations: how do all of my notes connect to build to a theme? Write a final end note: Theme(s). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the theme feels hard to grasp, answer: <i>To what does the poem call our notice?</i> Check that your end note language is precise and avoids cliché.