Overview

The study of poetry is a challenge for many students. They wonder how to read a poem, how to determine what it means, and how to discuss what they observe in their reading of the poem. These notes contain suggestions on reading poetry as well as discussions of significant poetic devices.

N.B. These notes have been assembled from a variety of sources, many of which have long been out of print. ¹

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Part I
Suggestions on Reading a Poem

Let’s face it: poetry is not ordinary language. Reading poetry takes effort and concentration, and many people are unsure of how to read it. Because lines and phrases in a poem may carry various meanings some students assume that a poem “Can mean anything I think it means, because it’s subjective... so you can’t tell me I’m wrong. It’s my interpretation.” This seems sensible at first, but it really is a bit silly; because if this highly personal approach were appropriate for poetry, then it would be appropriate for all forms of communication. (Imagine debating the meaning of a stop sign!)

There are some simple strategies a reader can use to deepen an understanding of the piece of poetry he or she is examining. While the suggested strategies appear to be quite different from each other, their common thrust is to draw the reader nearer to the details of the poem. As you work with these strategies, you may find yourself gravitating to one favorite strategy, or you may find that you use all of them at some time.

1  Find a Private Place

In a private quiet place, it is easy to read poetry, aloud. That is something that is unlikely to happen on a school bus or in the cafeteria. The advantage of reading aloud is that the reader begins to hear the “voice” or voices behind the poem.

Try reading the lines with different emphasis and at varied speeds. Imagine how different people might read the line, especially when it is possible that the line might have been spoken by a variety of different types of characters.

2  Sketching What You See

Poets use words to form pictures, also know as imagery (14.1) to convey meaning. Sometimes it is extremely helpful to visualize what we see as we read the poem. Simply stopping and doodling the main images that come to mind, or sketching these images while someone else reads the poem are two ways of recording the impressions. This is one way to work with a partner. Discussing the images you sketched and defending them to someone else may be very helpful in “unpacking” the meaning of a piece of poetry.

3  Finding All the Sentences

Many students assume that the end of a line of poetry is the end of the “sentence”. Interestingly, they would never make that assumption in a standard paragraph, in which case they would look for the end punctuation of the sentence. This
oversight leads to a confusion of meaning, because \textit{enjambment} is not taken into account. (Enjambment is the carrying of meaning across the end of one line and on to the end of the first logical "sentence.")

Part of the reason that students may assume that the end of the line is the end of a sentence lies in the fact that much modern, free verse poetry does not use punctuation in any regular fashion. Many of the free verse poets rely on the length of the phrase and the placement of words on the page to convey meaning. Never-the-less, when there is punctuation present in a poem the reader needs to heed it.

A simple strategy to find the sentences in a poem is to place a forward slash mark at every piece of end punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation marks) [Of course this should only be done on your personal copy of a poem, not in the text book.] Alternatively, some students have found that writing out the piece in complete sentences can be very effective.

4 Using a TF-TASTI Sheet

\textit{TFTASTI} is an acronym (a word or name coined from the initial letters of several words in a phrase) for a process which was devised by Jim Forrest, an Alberta high school English teacher. The acronym looks like this:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{T} = \textit{Titles}
  \item \textit{F} = \textit{Facts}
  \item \textit{T} = \textit{Techniques}
  \item \textit{A} = \textit{Attitudes}
  \item \textit{S} = \textit{Shifting}
  \item \textit{T} = \textit{Title}
  \item \textit{I} = \textit{Idea}
\end{itemize}

A copy of Mr. Forrest’s handout appears at the end of these notes as an appendix. (VI)

Part II
Two Basic Categories of Poetry

Regardless of the type or length of the poem, it will fall into one of two basic categories: \textit{Narrative} and \textit{Lyric}. The first category, Narrative, is primarily a category of story-telling poems; while the second category, Lyric, focuses on conveying feelings, ideals, impressions or images.

5 Narrative: the Whole Story

Life consists of stories, shared, formally (Think of the news) and informally (Did you hear the story of the man who...?) Many of the older forms of
poetry, developed in the oral tradition, were tales of heroism, adventure and betrayal. The tales of Camelot, Odysseus, and Grendel are Epics that we still enjoy today. Another large category of narrative tales is the ballad which is discussed in detail, below.(16)

The key point to remember is that the primary purpose of narrative poems is to narrate, to tell a story. The story line in such a narrative poem will contain characters, settings, plots and insights into theme.

6 Lyric: Songs, Feelings or Stories?

The second large category, the lyric, is used to convey feelings, emotions, impressions or ideals. These poems will not have explicit settings and plots, like narrative poetry will. Yet, there will appear to be a story behind the poem. Something has occurred and this something forms the context for the lyric reflection.

There is some confusion about the word, lyric, as it is used today. In part, this may stem from the fact that in ancient times, lyrics were often recited or sung to the accompaniment of a small stringed instrument called a lyre. As we discuss lyrics, then, it is important that we demonstrate which meaning of the word lyric we are using.

It should be noted that many of the lyrics or words to songs are lyrics in the sense that they convey feelings that arise in the context of a larger story; some of the words to songs, lyrics, however, primarily tell a story. The traditional song John Henry is a good example of the latter, as is the Gordon Lightfoot ballad, The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

Lyric poems masquerade under a variety of other names, among them the following: Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet, Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, (17) odes, epigrams, elegies, pastorals, haiku, tanka, and free verse poetry. It is not essential to do more than to recognize that these are names of types of lyric poetry, although throughout high school you will likely encounter all of them.

Part III

Structures of Groups of Lines

Structured groups of lines are known as stanzas. Some people might refer to a stanza as a verse. This is particularly appropriate when the piece of poetry is a song such as a hymn, which may also contain a chorus or refrain, a series of lines that are repeated between each of the stanzas or verses.

As a side note, many older traditional ballads and songs had refrains such as With a hey nonny nonny no. While that may seem silly, it should be remembered that the refrain was usually sung between stanzas and allowed the musician a place to return to the top line of the accompaniment. Modern versions of such refrains are found in older rock and roll or popular music pieces,
also. Do wah diddy diddy dum diddy do or Sham-a-lang- a-ding-dong or No woman no cry are examples.

7 Ways to Describe Stanzas

Stanzas may be named for the number of lines they contain. (Notice in each case below that the root portion of the name is italicized as a reminder.)

7.1 Couple
— contains two lines. The last word of the two lines generally rhyme. Taken by themselves, the following lines from Robert Browning’s The Pied Piper of Hamelin forms a rhyming couplet.

Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives —
Followed the Piper for their lives.

7.2 Quatrain
— consists of four lines, usually drawn together by some form of end rhyme (9.1) The following stanza form Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky illustrates the quatrain.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

7.3 Sestet
— consists of six lines. This particular form of stanza is found in the Petrarchan or Italian Sonnet (17). The key to recognizing this stanza type is that there are six lines drawn together with some form of end rhyme.

7.4 Octave
— consists of eight lines. In a similar way to the sestet (above) this stanza type, too, is most often found in the Petrarchan or Italian Sonnet, which is discussed in detail, below (17).

8 Lengths of Lines Have Names

In discussing poetry, two part names may be assigned to various line configurations.

The first of the two names will indicate the type of metric foot: iambic, trochaic, anapestic or dactylic. Each of these names for metric feet indicates
a different pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. These patterns are discussed in the next section.

The second name indicates the length of the line in terms of the number of feet it contains. Each of these names starts with a different prefix which indicates the number of feet in a line. These names are charted in section 8.2.

8.1 Names of Feet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METER NAME</th>
<th>FOOT NAME</th>
<th>PATTERN IN SYLLABLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iambic</td>
<td>Iamb</td>
<td>one unstressed, one stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*The brain/ is wid/er than/ the sky/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trochaic</td>
<td>Trochee</td>
<td>one stressed, one unstressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Will iam/ Yeats is/ laid to/ rest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anapestic</td>
<td>Anapest</td>
<td>two unstressed, one stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>And the peak/ of the moun/ tain was ap/ ples, the hug/ est that e/ ver were seen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dactylic</td>
<td>Dactyl</td>
<td>one stressed, two unstressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Af ter the/ pangs of a/ des perate</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.2 Names of Line Lengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF LINE LENGTH</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FEET IN THE LINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mono - meter</td>
<td>one foot of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di - meter</td>
<td>two feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tri - meter</td>
<td>three feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tetra - meter</td>
<td>four feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penta - meter</td>
<td>five feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hexa - meter</td>
<td>six feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hepta - meter</td>
<td>seven feet of any meter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combination of the two names (the foot name and the line length name) makes more sense with some illustrative examples. In each of the examples, below, the stressed syllables have been italicized and the end of each foot is marked with a forward slash (/).

**iambic monometer** – Lines of one foot in length are very rare occurrences, although one poet did write -

Thus *I/
Passe *by/And *die*/
dactylic dimeter – Two foot lines are not much more common, but these will illustrate their possibility:

    *Can* non to/* right* of them/

iambic trimeter is slightly more common.

    A lone/* he* rides/* a* lone/
    The fair/* and fa/* tal king/

iambic tetrameter – This line length has been around for some time as this Middle English line demonstrates.

    Al of/* a* knyght/* was fai*/ and gent/
    In ba/* taille and/* in tour/* na ment/

dactylic tetrameter

    Af ter the/* pangs of a/* des perate/* lo ver

anapestic tetrameter"

    Of my dar/* ling — my dar/* ling — my life/* and my bride/²

iambic pentameter is the most common speech pattern in the English language. It seems to imitate the natural cadence or rhythms of our language. Most of Shakespeare’s work is written in iambic pentameter.

    When I/* have fears/* that I/* may cea*/ to be/

The above examples will be an invaluable reference to understanding meter and scansion (the practice of sorting out the number of syllables and feet in a line of poetry). You may have noted that not all the feet in the examples above are complete. Don’t let that be a problem: the overall patterns should be the focus.

As a final note, when trying to determine whether a line of poetry has iambic, trochaic, anapestic or dactylic feet, tapping out the rhythm as you read aloud is a good strategy.

Part IV
Poetic Devices (Figurative Language)

If one were to spend enough time studying guides to poetry (and libraries have many that are worth consulting during your studies) one would undoubtedly

discover many more poetic devices and ways to talk about poetry than are discussed in this set of notes. Great! But the purpose of this set of notes is to give you enough of the basics to speak and write about poetry in an informed fashion.

The following sections contain material with which all high school English graduates should be familiar.

9 Devices Depending on Rhyme

Rhyme is a general term referring to the repetition of similar sounds, usually at regular intervals. These sounds can be vowels, consonants or both. It is important to note that the critical focus is on the sounds not the letters: the sound not the shape develops rhyme. Four devices depending on rhyme occur commonly in poetry.

9.1 End Rhyme

This is the rhyme with which most people are familiar. Words with similar sounding endings occur at the ends of lines of poetry to develop a rhyme scheme. This rhyme scheme may be annotated with letters to indicate patterns. Many of us have heard limericks which have a readily identifiable rhyme scheme:

There was a young lady of Niger A
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger; A
They returned from the ride B
With the lady inside, B
And a smile on the face of the tiger. A

9.2 Internal Rhyme

When words within a line and the word at the end of the line rhyme, an instance of internal rhyme occurs.

Spanish ships of war at sea! we have sighted fifty-three!

9.3 Alliteration

—is the repetition of initial consonant sounds.

She sells sea shells by the sea shore.

[A Note of Interest — in the example above, that the alliteration applies only to the initial 's' sounds. The final 's' sounds are examples of consonance (15.3)]
9.4 Assonance

—is a repetition of vowel sounds to create a sense of rhyme.

The Lotus blooms below the barren creek

Notice in the examples, above, that 1.) rhyme is not always perfect and 2.) often more than one type of rhyme occur together. Alliteration and assonance appear together, for example.

10 Devices Depending on Comparisons

Perhaps, the two most common comparisons are ones we learn quite naturally in our day-to-day speech. We may say, “He’s as big as a horse.” or “She’s a real swan; just watch her swim!” Metaphor and simile are learned well before we discuss them in school.

10.1 Metaphor

—is a comparative statement which uses the verb, IS, or asserts that one thing “is” another, which in fact it can not be.

A mighty fortress is our God.

The moon was a ghostly galleon. (A galleon is a sailing vessel.)

10.2 Simile

—is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two things or ideas. As or like is used as the connector between the two items that are being compared.

My Love is like a red, red rose.

Her teeth are like stars . . . They come out at night.

11 Devices Depending on Personal Traits

Some poetic devices treat the object of discussion as though it were in some way human or animate.

11.1 Personification

Inanimate objects or abstract ideas are given the attributes of human beings. These attributes may be references to human actions or physiology.
I saw the old moon last night,
with the new moon in her arms.

Death is a grim reaper.

11.2 Apostrophe
An absent person or a non-human entity or an abstract concept is addressed directly.

Blow, ye fearsome winds, blow.

Ah! Shakespeare, you should be here at this hour!

Justice — are you really blind?

12 Devices Requiring Previous Knowledge
Some poetic devices require the reader to dig into his or her own prior knowledge. It may be that the reader needs to be familiar with common speech patterns or she may be expected to have acquired some special knowledge in the process of living.

12.1 Allusions
— are indirect references to persons, places, things, common stories or names. The writer assumes that the reader is aware of these references. These references may arise from Biblical, mythological, or historical literature or knowledge.

   Crossing the River Jordan
   Adam and Eve
   Medusa
   The Battle of the Little Big Horn
   Hiroshima

12.2 Clichés
— are over-used, abused and worn-out expressions. These once clever turns of phrase have lost their freshness.

   Busy as a bee.
Brown as a berry.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

It is worth noting that authors can use clichés effectively. For example, characterizing an old-fashioned, unchanging individual may call for some cliché dialogue.

13 Devices Depending on Shades of Meaning

Some figurative language hinges on multiple shades of meaning: literal meanings and intent are not exactly the same, and perhaps opposite of each other in these devices.

13.1 Irony

— is a figure of speech in which what is actually said is opposite in meaning to what is actually meant. Irony can range from simple sarcasm to more complex forms. Telling a tom-boy, who carries on in an un-lady-like fashion, that she is an elegant debutante is quite a simple example of verbal irony.

Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* is a far more complex and critical work, set during one of the Irish famines. In his work he argues that the starving and prolific Irish should consider selling their babies for food in order to stave off starvation. Swift’s caustic tone was intended to shame the English landlords who were callous toward the needs of their starving Irish tenants. Swift did not intend his audience to take literally his suggestions of infanticide and cannibalism. His irony was intended to shock his readers into critical thought.

In literature, generally, three forms of irony are recognized —

1) *verbal irony*, which is discussed above.

2) *situational irony*, in which the unexpected happens when it is least expected — the fireman's house might burn down or the policeman’s son turns out to be a robber, or the teacher’s daughter continually skips school.

3) *dramatic irony* has the audience in the theater (or the reader in any other piece of literature) knowing something that the main characters in the piece do not know.

13.2 Understatement

— is a specialized form of irony. The item discussed is presented as much less than what it is known to be.

Bill is such a poor man that he can only afford to fly to Hawaii at Christmas and Easter.
13.3 Hyperbole

From our earliest efforts to communicate, we have learned to exaggerate to make a point. Whether the whopping great lie about the fish that got away or the statements designed to persuade others — all of these are hyperbole.

I’d rather bite off my tongue than speak to him!

I’d die before I kissed her!

The field was covered with millions of elk.

14 Devices Which Develop Pictures

Although all authors attempt to show rather than tell in their writing, poets excel at using words to develop images, pictures and impressions that appeal to our five senses.

14.1 Imagery

—is the visual picture an author or poet creates through—

1) use of various figurative devices such as similes, metaphors and personification.
2) diction.
3) the overall tone of the work.

When considering imagery, it is important to take note of the over-all trends in a work. For example, a poet may describe a series of human interactions using very mechanistic language, perhaps referring to people as robots, describing their joints as hinges, and their eyes, ears and mouthes as data processors. Such a portrayal would suggest mechanistic imagery.

More commonly, traditional love poetry often makes use of comparisons between natural items such as the sun, clouds, rain and characteristics of the person who is described in the poem. This is natural imagery.

The development of imagery is not limited to the two types above. The key to understanding this concept is to determine to what class or group the diction and images within the poem belong.

14.2 Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia has also been called imitative harmony. All of the words that appear in the action comics balloons and which are not direct speech are onomatopoeic: Biff, oomph, splat and others fall into this category, as do buzz, zap, bang and boom. Each of these is an attempt to transcribe a sound, to imitate the actual sound using letters or words.

Consider that it might also be possible to use alliteration, assonance and consonance to develop onomatopoeia.
Some Less Common Poetic Devices

The terms in this section are used less often in discussions of poetry than are the terms that have been discussed so far. Never-the-less, once you read the descriptions and the examples below, you may be surprised to realize that these poetic devices are already a part of your own experience.

15.1 Synechdoche

In this figure of speech, a part represents the whole. The most famous example of this comes from a piece known as *The Lord’s Prayer*, which includes this line:

> And give us this day our daily *bread*.

This *bread* is intended to be more than merely bread, but all of the food that is required to sustain life. Some would see this as not only food to stave off hunger, but also as spiritual guidance (food).

Another common example of *synechdoche* is the expression —

> a roof over our heads

This expression implies all of the other parts of a house or home that make for appropriate shelter.

15.2 Metonymy

Similarly to *synechdoche*, *metonymy* uses a trait or attribute to represent a larger concept to which that trait belongs. In the case of *metonymy*, however, the connection is much clearer, much more closely connected. Three common instances of metonymy appear below:

> He made his living on the *stage*; he was an actor.

> *The crown* (the monarch) took responsibility for defending the peasants.

> As the police cruiser pulled up in the driveway, someone shouted, “*The Law* has arrived!”

15.3 Consonance

— most often occurs with *alliteration*. Consonance is the repetition of final consonant sounds, forming a repetition or rhyme unlike internal rhyme. Under Alliteration (9.3) we discussed the initial letters in the following example:

> She sells sea shells by the sea shore.
Now, we note that there is an instance of repetition of the final consonant ‘s’. Other instances of consonance appear in such examples as — lock, stock and barrel, first and last, short and sweet, or stroke of luck.

Part V
Two Important Forms of Poetry

16 Ballads

While other narrative forms such as the epic, which is usually read in a prose transliteration, may be studied in high school, students will certainly encounter one or more ballads.

16.1 Some Common Types of Ballads

There are various categories which may be used to discuss the ballad:

Traditional Ballads will form the major focus of this section. These ballads arose from an early oral tradition which was passed on by traveling minstrels, each of whom would adapt the ballad to his audience’s tastes. Because these were originally sung versions of narratives that people shared there were different versions of the same ballad and authorship was undetermined: Barbara Allen, Sir Patrick Spens and Twa Corbies are examples of anonymous, traditional ballads.

Literary Ballads were conscious attempts to imitate the style and content of the traditional ballad. Sir Walter Scott’s Lochnivar and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner exemplify this form of the ballad.

Western Ballads like The Streets of Laredo capture a folk tradition that is more modern than the traditional ballad. This later oral tradition seems to reflect the early cowboys and outlaws, frontier era. Like the earlier traditional ballads, these are also anonymous.

Modern Ballads are generally sung, and generally of fairly certain authorship, although these, too, may tap folk traditions or local histories. The primary focus of these ballads is disasters (Gordon Lightfoot’s Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald or Tom Connor’s Massacre of the Black Donnellys). These ballads sometimes appear to be more lyrical (6) than narrative.

16.2 The Traditional Ballad: Characteristics

This narrative form has several readily identifiable characteristics:
1. It is relatively short. Many readers will find that ballads are quite long compared to shorter lyric poems they have read, but compared to an epic, the ballad is relatively short, typically running around six to twelve stanzas. These stanzas may have refrains interspersed between them.

2. Traditional ballads were originally sung, because they were the stock and trade of traveling minstrels and troubadours.

3. Because of its heritage in song, the ballad often makes good use of repetition of phrases or entire lines. These allow the musician to coordinate the music with the words and possibly allowed an opportunity for audience participation.

4. Several versions of the most popular ballads exist. Some variants may differ from others by minor differences in one or two stanzas.

5. Authorship of these ballads is unknown; they are anonymous.

6. As skillful narratives, the ballad sets the reader down in the midst of the situation. Antecedent action (what happened before the immediate point in the narrative) is revealed as necessary in the process of the narrative.

7. As with every good story, information is skillfully withheld to allow for a “punch-line” or surprise for the reader to discover.

8. The structure of the Ballad stanza is generally a quatrain (7.2) though couplets (7.1) also appear occasionally. The end rhyme (9.1) scheme of the quatrains is most often A B C B, although other patterns are also possible.

17 Sonnets

Sonnets are fourteen line lyrical poems, written in iambic pentameter. While there are several variations of the sonnet, including ones written by contemporary poets, the two most common are the Petrarchan or Italian sonnet and the Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet.

17.1 Petrarchan Sonnet

English literature has borrowed from the Italian. Among these borrowings are the basic story lines of many Elizabethan plays as well as the basic concept of the sonnet.

This earliest form of the sonnet consists of an octave (7.4) followed by a sestet (7.3) The first eight lines develops a concept or idea and the last six lines consist of a turn around or variation on the first eight lines. This two part split may also be thought of as the presentation of a theme or a problem followed by the presentation of an answer or resolution. This split comes much later in the Shakespearean sonnet.
The rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet is generally: \textit{ ABBAABBA CDECDE}. A common variation on the sestet’s rhyme scheme is \textit{ CDCDCD}.

17.2 Shakespearean Sonnet

While there have been many poets, notably Elizabethans, who penned sonnets, William Shakespeare undoubtedly was the most prolific with over a hundred sonnets to his credit, hence the name, Shakespearean.

This sonnet is similar to the Petrarchan sonnet in intent and topic, but different in structure. The Shakespearean sonnet may be thought of as three quatrains (7.2) followed by a couplet (7.1). The problem or situation is presented in the first twelve lines and the resolution occurs in the last two. The end rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet is — \textit{ ABABCDCDEFEF GG}.

As you discover sonnets, you will encounter variations that fit neither of the patterns presented above. Some sonneteers introduce a split before the octave finishes or before the end of the last quatrain. Some use different end rhyme schemes. Some, including Shakespeare, have produced a few lyric poems that contain only twelve or thirteen lines, though in all other respects these poems appear to be sonnets. Be open to some variation.

Part VI

A Final Note

Remember, that the purpose of these notes is to equip the reader with the language to talk about poetry he or she is reading. Slavish adherence to rules or simple memorization of this material will be of very little benefit.

Finally, the reason to have a \textit{jargon} (specialized technical language) to speak about poetry is in order to deepen one’s appreciation and to be able to share that and new insights with others.

Above all — enjoy the poetry!
Following the process outlined below will allow you to confidently and accurately understand and explain even the most challenging poetry. The best results will come from taking careful and detailed notes for each step, following the order outlined below. Welcome to the wonderful world of poetry.

1. **T = Title**
   Before reading the poem, take a careful look at the title and make educated predictions about the subject matter, setting, themes, moods, etc. of the poem.

2. **F = Facts**
   In many ways, this is the key step in the whole process, because not being clear about the factual (ie. literal) meaning of a poem will almost always lead to confusion and/or error in understanding the abstract (ie. figurative) ideas and feelings that the poem is communicating. Therefore, be very careful and thorough in taking notes and finding evidence at this stage. The questions you should try to answer are—
   a) Who? — Who is the narrator (speaker) of the poem? Who are the other characters in the poem? What do you know about these people? Evidence?
   b) Where? and When? (Setting) — What are the implications of setting the poem at this place and this time?
   c) What happens? (Plot) — Exactly what events happen or have happened in the poem?

3. **T = Techniques**
   Identify specific examples of poetic techniques employed in the poem, and if possible explain how these techniques contribute to the MOOD and/or meaning of the poem. Look for techniques such as:
   a) Imagery and Image Patterns
   b) Figurative Language - – ie. Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Allusion, etc.
   c) Sound Techniques — ie. Rhyme, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia, etc
   d) Other Language Techniques — Diction, Syntax, Connotation, etc.
4. **A = Attitude**

Identify and explain the attitude(s) (ie. TONE) of the narrator and/or the writer toward the characters, events, etc. in the poem. As much as possible, provide direct evidence from the text (ie. words, phrases) to support your explanation of the attitudes you identify.

5. **S = Shifts**

Identify and explain the significant shifts and changes in the poem. Specifically, look for shifts in:
   a) narrative voice (ie. the change to a new speaker)
   b) stanzas (Why change to a new stanza here?)
   c) image patterns, diction, syntax
   d) setting, action
   e) logical organisation (Key Words - *but, however, yet, although*, etc)
   f) verb tenses
   g) line lengths
   h) punctuation (dashes, periods, ellipsis, etc.)

6. **T = Title**

Return to the title and make further notes about its significance and implications, especially at the level of figurative meaning, in light of the analysis done so far.

7. **I = Idea**

In one or two complete sentences, summarise the primary idea(s) and/or feelings that the poet is communicating in the poem. In other words, what is the poet saying about people and/or life in the poem? This summary statement should be the result of and consistent with the details of your analysis in the preceding categories.