

20 Questions to ask when analysing a poem

1. Who is the speaker? What kind of person is he/she?
2. To whom is s/he speaking? What kind of person is s/he?
3. What is the occasion?
4. What is the setting in time (time of day, season, century ...)?
5. What is the setting in place (indoors or out, city or country, nation ...)?
6. What is the central purpose of the poem?
7. State the central idea or theme of the poem in a sentence.
8. Discuss the tone of the poem. How is it achieved?
9. a) Complete an outline of the poem so as to show its structure and development.
or
b) Summarise the events of the poem.
10. Paraphrase the poem
11. Discuss the diction of the poem. Point out words that are particularly well chosen and why they are well chosen.
12. Discuss the imagery of the poem. What kinds of imagery are used?
13. Point out examples of metaphor, simile, personification, and metonymy and explain their appropriateness.
14. Point out and explain any symbols. If the poem is allegorical, explain the allegory.
15. Point out and explain examples of paradox, overstatement, understatement, and irony. What are their functions?
16. Point out and explain any allusions. What is their function?
17. Point out significant examples of sound repetition and explain their function?
18. a) What is the meter of the poem?
b) Copy the poem and mark its scansion.
19. Discuss the adaptation of sound to sense.
19. Describe the form or pattern of the poem.
20. Finally, criticise and evaluate the poem.