

Diagnostic

- If you did not write the diagnostic test, it must be written before you may continue your studies.
- Online section by 4pm, written by 5pm in L116
- See Len Fehr, the writing instructor.

- Reading the language, form, structure, and all textual elements in order to see what the work says apart from anything you might want to bring into it
- This is **close reading** and it's the first thing you should do to any text you read

KEEP IN MIND

- A **text** can't just mean what you want it to mean
- Although poetry and other **texts** may have multiple meanings or values, those meanings have to *be* there; they can't be imposed upon **texts** by virtue of an unexplained response on the part of the reader.

- A crucial part of what makes a **text** have a complex meaning that is *worth* analysing has to do with **language**--the way it's used, the values of the words, the presentation of complex ideas through the use of literary **tropes (repeated symbols, characters, ideas, etc)**, figurative language, and the manipulation of **form** and **structure**

- In the way the reader is involved in the **production of meaning**. This doesn't mean that it's not *there*—it means that you have to work to find it, and that the work is a part of the way the text produces its meanings.
- It means that **critical thinking** is part of the way the text works at any level.

How to Read and Understand a Poem

- A good poem is like a puzzle—the most fascinating part is studying the individual pieces carefully and then putting them back together to see how beautifully the whole thing fits together.
- A poem can have a number of different "pieces" that you need to look at closely in order to complete the poetic "puzzle."

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Examine the **poetic voice** in the poem:

- Who is the speaker? Is there an identifiable speaker
- Is the poet speaking to the reader directly or is the poem told through a fictional "persona"?
- To whom is he speaking?
- Can you trust the speaker? This will become an issue in "My Last Duchess."

Examine the **tone** in the poem:

- What is the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem?
- What sort of tone of voice seems to be appropriate for reading the poem out loud?
 - Loud, quiet, fast, slow?
- What words, images, or ideas give you a clue to the tone?

Examine the **form/structure** of the poem:

Look at the number of lines, their length, their arrangement on the page.

- How does the form relate to the content? Is it a traditional form (e.g. sonnet, limerick) or "free form"?
- Why do you think the poet chose that form for his poem?

Examine the **movement** of the poem:

- How does the poem develop?
- Are the images and ideas developed chronologically, by cause and effect, by free association?
- Does the poem circle back to where it started, or is the movement from one attitude to a different attitude (such as from despair to hope)?

Examine the **syntax** of the poem:

- How many sentences are in the poem?
- Are the sentences simple or complicated?
- Are the verbs in front of the nouns instead of in the usual "noun, verb" order? Why?

Examine the **punctuation** of the poem:

- What kind of punctuation is in the poem?
- Does the punctuation always coincide with the end of a poetic line? If so, this is called an **end-stopped line**.
- If there is no punctuation at the end of a line and the thought continues into the next line, this is called **enjambement**.
- Is there any punctuation in the middle of a line?
- Why do you think the poet would want you to pause halfway through the line?

Examine the **title** of the poem:

- What does the title mean?
- How does it relate to the poem itself?

Examine the **language** of the poem:

- **Diction** or Word Choice: Is the language colloquial, formal, simple, unusual?
- Do you know what all the words mean? If not, look them up.
- What moods or attitudes are associated with words that stand out for you?

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- **Allusions**: Are there any allusions (references) to something outside the poem, such as events or people from history, mythology, or religion?
- **Imagery**: Look at the figurative language of the poem--metaphors, similes, analogies, personification.
- How do these images add to the meaning of the poem or intensify the effect of the poem?

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- Rhyme scheme: Does the rhyme occur in a regular pattern, or irregularly? Is the effect formal, satisfying, musical, funny, disconcerting?

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- Rhyme scheme: Does the rhyme occur in a regular pattern, or irregularly? Is the effect formal, satisfying, musical, funny, disconcerting?
- Rhythm or meter: In most languages, there is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a word or words in a sentence. In poetry, the variation of stressed and unstressed syllables and words has a rhythmic effect. What is the tonal effect of the rhythm here? How does it sound when you read it aloud?

Examine the **musical devices** in the poem:

- Other "sound effects": **alliteration**
- **assonance** (repetition of vowel sounds)
- **consonance repetition** (repetition of consonant sounds)
- What effect do they have here?

Finally....

- **Has the poem created a change in mood for you, or a change in attitude?**
- **How have the technical elements helped the poet create this effect?**

YB Yeats, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1893)

- I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
- And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.
- I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear the water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

