

## Guidelines for Poetry Analysis

### ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS

#### SUBJECT-MATTER

- What event, situation, or experience does the poem describe or record?
- Who is the speaker? Is the poet speaking in the role of another person, an animal, a thing? To whom is the speaking talking?
- What is the time setting - hour of day, season, era?
- What is the place setting?

#### PURPOSE, THEME, OR MESSAGE

- What seems to be the poet's purpose in writing this - what message, ideas, issues, themes, (etc.) are communicated?

#### EMOTION, MOOD, OR FEELING

- What is the poet's tone? Watch for shifts in tone especially toward the end of the poem.
- What is the poet's attitude toward the subject?
- What is the predominant emotion, or mood, of the poem? Does the mood change during the poem?
- What emotions or feelings does the poet seek to evoke in the reader / listener?

#### CRAFTSMANSHIP, OR TECHNIQUE (see below)

This aspect of the poem deals with specific skills the poet has used in creating his or her work of art:

- Structure
- Language
- Imagery
- Movement
- Sound

#### SUMMARY

Having analysed the poem, it is important to synthesise (pull all the information together) into a summary. What is the impact of the whole poem for you? How successful is it as a work of art? Does it successfully achieve the poet's purpose or is it flawed in some serious way?

### Looking Closer at Craftsmanship

#### Structure

How is the poem structured? Does it have a conventional structure such as a sonnet, or an ode? Does it have stanzas with a regular number of lines, or any other interesting features of structural design? Can you identify the type of poem - sonnet, free verse, ballad, etc.? Is the poem lyric, dramatic, narrative, or a combination? How can you tell?

## **Language**

- How would you describe the poet's use of words - vivid, striking, effective or colourless and predictable? What visual images are brought to mind?
- What sensations does the poem evoke: sound, touch, smell, taste, movement, etc.? What words are used in surprising or imaginative ways? Look for puns.
- Are there any inverted word orders or sentences? What would be the usual order? What purpose is served by the inversion?
- Is the language appropriate to subject and/or theme? What effect does the language have on the poem's achievement?

## **Imagery**

Are there any striking examples of figurative language used? What things are compared (similes, metaphors, personifications or symbols) in the poem? Are their analogies or conceits? What is their effect?

## **Movement or Rhythm**

Does the poem have a regular (slow or fast) rhythm? What is the effect of any rhythmic qualities?

## **Sounds**

Does the poem have any significant sound features? Is it musical? Does the poet use onomatopoeia, alliteration, or assonance? Does the poem rhyme? What are the effects of these features of sound on the achievement of the poem?

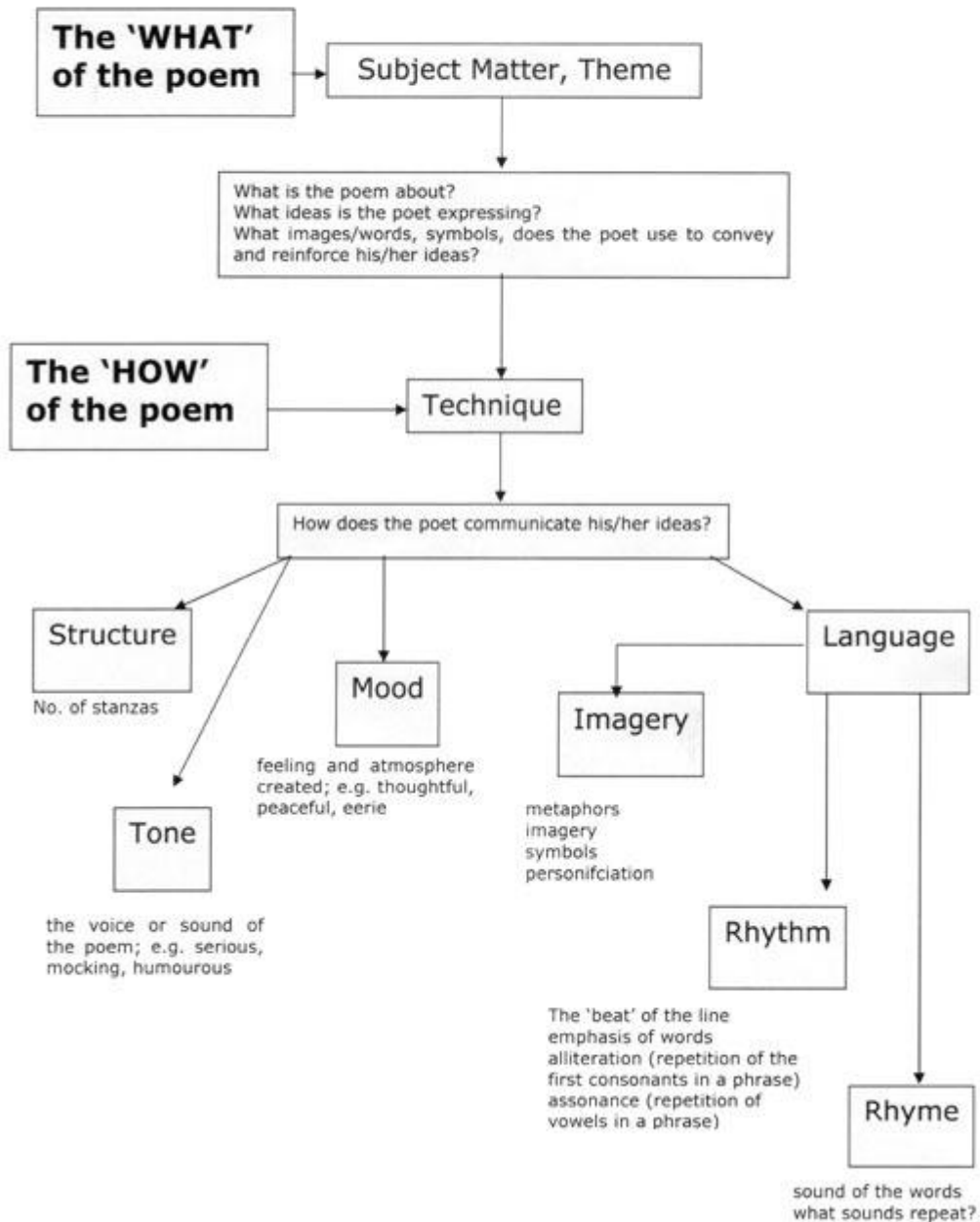
The diagram below shows another approach you may wish to take:

## Analysing Poetry

This diagram is a useful way to analyse a poem. Always ask yourself:

**WHAT** is the poet saying?

**HOW** does the poet say it?



## Sample Poems

### "It Was Long Ago"

Eleanor Farjeon

I'll tell you, shall I, something I remember?  
Something that still means a great deal to me.  
It was long ago.

A dusty road in summer I remember,  
A mountain, and an old house, and a tree  
That stood, you know.

Behind the house. An old woman I remember  
In a red shawl with a grey cat on her knee  
Humming under a tree.

She seemed the oldest thing I can remember,  
But then perhaps I was not more than three.  
It was long ago.

I dragged on the dusty road, and I remember  
How the old woman looked over the fence at me  
And seemed to know

How it felt to be three, and called out,  
I remember 'Do you like bilberries and cream for tea?'  
I went under the tree

And while she hummed, and the cat purred, I remember  
How she filled a saucer with berries and cream for me  
So long ago,

Such berries and such cream as I remember  
I never had seen before, and never see  
To day, you know.

And that is almost all I can remember,  
The house, the mountain, the grey cat on her knee,  
Her red shawl, and the tree,

And the taste of the berries, the feel of the sun I remember,  
And the smell of everything that used to be  
So long ago,

Till the heat on the road outside again I remember,  
And how the long dusty road seemed to have for me  
No end, you know.

That is the farthest thing I can remember.  
It won't mean much to you. It does to me.  
Then I grew up, you see.

**Read a sample response to this poem and note how the above elements are covered.**

### **Sample Poem 2**

Read “The African Beggar” below and try your hand at analysing the poem.

African Beggar by Raymond Tong

Sprawled in the dust outside the Syrian store,  
a target for small children, dogs and flies,  
a heap of verminous rags and matted hair,  
he watches us with cunning, reptile eyes,  
his noseless, smallpoxed face creased in a sneer.

Sometimes he shows his yellow stumps of teeth  
and whines for alms, perceiving that we bear  
the curse of pity; a grotesque mask of death,  
with hands like claws about his begging-bowl.

But often he is lying all alone  
within the shadow of a crumbling wall,  
lost in the trackless jungle of his pain,  
clutching the pitiless red earth in vain  
and whimpering like a stricken animal.

[Compare your analysis with the sample.](#)