How to Read a Poem

1. Read syntactically—not line by line. Pause only when the author tells you to through punctuation.
2. Read it once for a general feeling.
3. Read it a second time to analyze it using TPCASST.
4. Read it a third time to synthesize meaning and analysis.

**T**itle

**P**araphrase **C**onnotation **A**ttitude/tone **S**yntax **S**tructure **T**heme/tone

What does the TITLE say to you? Is it a preview for the poem? Are there any epigraphs?

PARAPHRASE each sentence or stanza so you understand what the author is talking about.

Do certain words have a CONNOTATIVE meaning? What are they? Why are they used?

What is the author’s ATTITUDE or point of view toward their subject? What TONE does this create?

What is the SYNTAX like? Long sentences? Short? How often does the punctuation cause you to pause? Where? Why?

What is the STRUCTURE of the poem? How many stanzas are there? Is it free verse or a structured form?

What is the deeper meaning, the controlling idea; the THEME of the poem? How does the TONE help create this THEME?

“If We Must Die” by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs   
Hunted and penned in an inglorious[[1]](#footnote-1) spot,   
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,   
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.   
If we must die, O let us nobly die,   
So that our precious blood may not be shed   
In vain; then even the monsters we defy   
Shall be constrained[[2]](#footnote-2) to honor us though dead!   
O kinsmen![[3]](#footnote-3) we must meet the common foe!   
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,   
And for their thousand blows deal one death-  
 blow!   
What though before us lies the open grave?   
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly   
 pack,   
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

“Egg” by Linda Pastan

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| In this kingdom the sun never sets; under the pale oval  of the sky  there seems no way in or out, and though there is a sea here  there is no tide.  For the egg itself  is a moon glowing faintly  in the galaxy of the barn,  safe but for the spoon's  ominous thunder,  the first delicate  crack of lightning. |  |
|  | |
|  | |

A. To write a thematic sentence (THEME is always a complete sentence), first make a list of topics in the poem. Then use those words to create a sentence.

Topics/Ideas in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thematic Sentence:

B. To write a topic sentence of literary analysis, use the following formula.

adj. lit. term adj. lit. term

^ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ VERB ^ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

e.g.: The repetitive diction creates an admiring tone.

Topic Sentence for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

adjective lit. term verb adjective lit. term

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1. Inglorious (adjective): causing shame, loss of honor [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Constrain (verb): to compel or force someone to do something [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. refers to men who or of blood relation to the speaker or a part of the group of people fighting [↑](#footnote-ref-3)