

Remember: in a good poem NOTHING is ACCIDENTAL and it is SUPPOSED to be read ALOUD! Note these points as you 'observe' the poem, and then by reading and looking out for the points below, you will begin to understand and unravel the poem- thereby being able to write about it in a meaningful way.

1. Before you even begin to read the poem, LOOK at the SHAPE of it on the page:

- Is it divided into regular STANZAS (= verses)? If not, this may tell you something about the MESSAGE of the poem. (An irregular, strange-looking poem with unequal lines may be telling us something shocking or unusual.)
- How many LINES are there in the poem? (If there are 14 lines, it is probably a SONNET)
- Where is the punctuation? Are there FULL STOPS or COMMAS at the end of lines, in the middle of the lines, or does the sentence flow on to the next line? (If the line breaks in the middle the poet might be trying to shock us or emphasise a point; if the words go on to the next line, the poet may be trying to copy the length of a long object e.g a river, or illustrate a long period of time).

2. Now think about the SOUND of the words as you read the words ALOUD:

- Are there words which copy the sound that of the subject ? (e.g.'bang' 'whizz', 'hiss' etc.)
- Does the poet use ALLITERATION (the repetition of the first consonant? If so, why? (i.e. is it drawing attention to something?)
- Do certain words RHYME? Is the rhyme regular? e.g. AA BB or ABAB
- Is there a regular RHYTHM (= BEAT)? and could this further emphasize the 'normality' or 'abnormality' of the theme or message i.e. an irregular rhythm might be a deliberate attempt to make us feel uneasy or uncomfortable about the theme of the work, whereas a regular rhythm may show that the poem was written as a song or meant to convey a cheerful mood.

3. Now look at the actual WORDS used:

Are the words long, short, simple, complicated? Are there foreign language words? (If it's a poem about death, for example, you might see 'sad' adjectives like 'dark, night, black, winter' etc; if it's about love, on the other hand, you may see happy words like 'light, white, rose, spring' etc; simple words may show that a child is the 'speaker' etc.)

4. IMAGERY

- Look for any IMAGES (METAPHORS or SIMILES) used in the poem
- Can you spot any PERSONIFICATION (e.g. 'Old Father Time', 'the trees waved at the sun'.) Again, think about why the poet may have chosen to do this.

5. MOOD

How does the poem make you FEEL?

6. Now spend some time just thinking about what the poem is ABOUT:

- Is it simply a NARRATIVE poem (i.e. a STORY)?
- Or is there a MESSAGE? What is it, in your opinion?

7. Finally, try to decide whether the poem is EFFECTIVE (= SUCCESSFUL)

Do you think that the words chosen match the story or illustrate the message well? In other words, does the poem work for you? (You can usually assume that you will be given a good poem in an exam so, unless you are convinced it's a bad poem and can prove it with examples, it's usually best to agree that it is IS effective!!)

Interesting to Know -

CHORAL RECITATION---POETRY

- * Choral recitation is sometimes called Union Reading or Choral Reading.
- * Choral Recitation requires participants eg a group to interpret or to recite from memory.
- * Poetry is especially suitable for choral recitation eg ballads, narrative poetry, adventure poetry.
- * Give advance thought to choice of poem and interpretation eg imagery, onomatopoeia(sound words), mood, tone, punctuation, rhythm and tempo, emphasis, action, lines to be delivered by whole group, part of the group or individuals, verbal and non-verbal elements eg phrasing and diction, dialogue, contrast in voice interpretation eg high, low, loud, soft, strong.

TYPES of CHORAL RECITATION

(i) REFRAIN

This is the most common form of choral recitation.

One person reads the narrative portion of the poem while the rest of the group joins in the refrain.

(ii) UNISON

The whole group reads together.

Sound effects might be included.

(iii) ANTIPHON

The group is divided into two.

Each group is responsible for a specific part of the chosen text.

(iv) SOLO LINES

Individuals read specific lines in appropriate places throughout the recitation

Most importantly, a successful Poetry Recitation Choir must sound as "one voice--- controlled, unified and harmonised."