

Rules for Poetry Explication

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What Does It Mean To Explicate a Poem?

1. The most important task is to analyze the meaning of the poem. Explore and explain its theme, as well as any sub-themes that appear.
2. Analyze poetic devices and their use.
3. Explain summarize the meaning of the poem.

Some Strategies to Successfully Explicate a Poem

1. As you read, look for unusual, distinct or clever phrasing of words or phrases. If a poet violates an expectation of language or presents an idea in an entirely new way, there is likely a reason that you can explore.
2. Look for powerful phrases that have an impact, because of meaning or sound quality. Look for metaphor, symbolism, sound devices.
3. Identify “cool” ideas that you can write about. In other words, if a poem references a historical event or philosophical ideal that you are familiar with, you certainly want to write about it.
4. Don’t fixate on the things that you don’t know; focus on the things that you do. In a poetry explication where you are only given ten minutes to read a poem, there is no way that you can expect to get everything. Emphasize your strengths and focus on those.
5. **Weave** in the use of poetic devices; don’t force them in. You want to demonstrate knowledge of the devices and their application, but they are tools, not the focal point of your writing.
6. Don’t write excessively about sound devices, meter, and rhythm unless you a) have little else to write about or b) are very good at it. They can be really powerful tools for analysis, but are often over-used and trite observations.
7. You are proving a thesis in a poetry explication. Don’t forget to write your paper with the central thesis in mind.

Patterns of Organization in Poetry Explication

1. Organize by Natural Divisions of the Poem. (Stanzas (if they are present), divisions of poetic forms like sonnets, or natural cleavages (sub-themes))
2. Organize by literary device.
3. Organize by sub-thesis.