

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING EACH POEM

A: Content (Meaning):

This concerns what John Crowe Ransom (see reading suggestions below) calls the 'logical core' of the poem.

1. **Theme:** Does the poem have something in common with rhetoric, i.e. is it an attempt by someone to persuade someone else to accept a particular point of view? If so, in one sentence or less, state what the poem is basically about, that is, the point which the poet is trying to make (e.g. 'Money is the root of all evil').
2. **The Development of the Poem's 'Argument':** How exactly does the poem try to make its case?
 - i) Paraphrase the poem as it develops step by step.
 - ii) Does the poem include a logical component (*logos*)? If so, which *enthymemes* (abbreviated forms of deduction) and *examples* (abbreviated forms of induction) are employed to this end?
 - iii) Does the poem base its argument on allusions to the poet's character or personality (*ethos*) in any way?
 - a) Is there an identifiable *voice* (*persona*) in the poem? If so, who is speaking?
 - b) Should one identify the *persona* with the poet? If so, does the poem reveal something about the poet?
 - c) What is the poet's *tone* (i.e. his attitude to his subject matter)?
 - iv) Does the poem buttress its argument by appealing to the audience's emotions (*pathos*) in some way? If so,
 - a) What emotions does the poem arouse?
 - b) What non-logical tools are used to these ends?
3. Does careful scrutiny of the precise way in which the poem develops alter your initial understanding of the poem's theme(s) above?

B: Form (Technique, Style):

This concerns what Ransom calls the 'local texture' of the poem.

1. **Genre:** Does the poem belong to an identifiable *kind* of poetry?
 - i) Is it a lyric poem as opposed to an epic poem?
 - ii) If the former, what *genre* of lyric poem is it (a sonnet, an ode, etc.)?
 - iii) What are the characteristics of the genre in question? (If necessary, look up this information.)
 - iv) Does the poem have a characteristic *stanzaic* structure associated with this genre?
 - v) Does the poem's genre shape in some way our understanding of the meaning of the poem which you discussed in Section A?
2. **Diction:** Examine the *figurative language* or *imagery* employed by identifying examples of *metaphor*, *simile*, etc. if any. How do these contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?
3. **Rhetorical Devices:** Identify examples of *paradox*, *hyperbole*, *litotes*, *irony*, *allusions*, etc., if any. How do these contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?

4. **Symbolism:** Identify examples of symbolism, if any. What is the meaning of the symbols identified? To what end are they used here? How do these contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?
5. **Sound Devices:** Identify examples of *alliteration*, *assonance* and *onomatopoeia* in the poem, if any. How do these contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?
6. **Metre:** Does the poem have an identifiable *rhythm*? Is it consistent or does it vary? How does it contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?
7. **Rhyme Scheme:** Does the poem rhyme in any way? If so, is the rhyme scheme consistent, i.e., does it follow a pattern of some kind? How does it contribute to the meaning of the poem discussed in Section A?

C: Content and Form:

1. Has an in-depth appreciation of the *form* of the poem arising from your answers to questions 1 to 7 in section B altered in any way your views on the *meaning* of the poem which you advanced in section A? Is a discussion of the form of a poem separable from that of the content of a poem and vice versa?

D: The Author and the Socio-Historical Context of Production:

1. Does the poet's life, mind, personality, outlook have any bearing on his/her poetry? If so, what have you been able to find out about him/her? What light does this information shed on the poem in question?
2. Is a poem shaped by the social and historical context in which it was produced? If so, what have you been able to find out about this context? What light does this information shed on the poem in question?
3. How, if at all, have you been forced to rethink your earlier answers with regard to form and context in light of your research about the poet and the milieu in which s/he wrote?

Relevant Readings Which You May Wish to Consult:

M. H Abrams, Glossary of Literary Terms: *passim*;

Aristotle, Poetics: see his discussion of the three basic kinds of poetry: lyric, epic and dramatic;

Aristotle, Rhetoric: see his definition of rhetoric and discussion of logos, pathos, ethos;

Bert Bach, et al., The Liberating Form: see their definitions of the various genres;

Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase": see his discussion of the danger of overlooking form;

Alastair Fowler, Kinds of Literature: he answers the question, 'what is a literary genre?';

John Crowe Ransom, "Criticism as Pure Speculation": see his concepts of 'logical core' and 'local texture.'