

# Examine the clues that lead to a poem's meaning.



1. Notice the title. Make notes about your initial reactions at the top of the poem.
2. Locate the independent clauses in the poem, and read them individually. (They will often not end at the ends of the lines.) Notice any that are questions. For each independent clause, underline the subject once and verb twice.
3. Place boxes around vivid words whose meanings are complex or particularly apt. Look up words that you do not know; underline these words, and write synonyms above the words in the poem.
4. Look for figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, symbol, allusion). Circle them and draw an arrow to the comparison—or explain the comparison if it is implied. Make notes in margin.



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5. Identify the speaker in this poem. From what point of view is the poem written? Use pronouns as clues. What is the occasion? Is it spoken to someone in particular? Make some notes about your ideas.
6. Locate the shift(s) in the poem (in point of view, tone, and focus), considering structure and idea changes; draw a dividing line (or lines) and briefly explain the shift. Notice the pivotal "turning" words (but, so, yet, however); make an asterisk beside these.
7. Identify the tone of the poem (or tones if there is a shift). Write the tone word(s) in the margin and draw arrows to elements of the poem that support the tone. Use your tone chart for precise words.
8. Read the poem again, aloud, preferably to someone else. Then, complete this sentence at the bottom of the page: *The poem "[title]" by [poet] is about [abstract topic], and it reveals [observation about humanity].*

# Search for larger thematic meaning.

## Step one:

You must first decide on the topic of the literary work. Choose an abstract concept like *unrequited love*, *freedom*, *abuse*, *jealousy*, *self-pity*, or *apathy* that the work explores. Then, finish this sentence:

The \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_  
(genre) (title) (author)

is about \_\_\_\_\_.  
(topic/abstract concept)





# Investigate the human condition.

## Step two:

Now, you need to state what the literary work expresses about the topic. If a poem is about *jealousy*, what idea does it express about that concept? Finish by inserting a clause to complete the following statement:

The \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_  
(genre) (title) (author)

is about \_\_\_\_\_ and reveals that  
(topic/abstract concept)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(opinion statement about humanity or human condition)



# Incorporate evidence.

## 1. **Expose**

After clearly expressing an idea, introduce the evidence and provide context.

## 2. **Excerpt**

Cite the evidence. When using a quotation, introduce it at the beginning of sentence.

## 3. **Explain**

Provide an explanation of the significance of the evidence and reveal how the evidence supports your idea.

### **Example :**

In *As I Lay Dying*, Cash's acts of devotion reveal that love, a verb more than a noun, is selfless. Before her death, he toils to make his mother's life less burdensome, completing Jewel's chores—"work that pa still thought Jewel was doing and that ma thought Dewey Dell was doing" (119)—without recognition. As Addie dies, Cash labors unceasingly in the rain, "soaked, scrawny, and tireless" (69), to construct a coffin that will provide a fitting burial for his mother. Cash functions without concern for himself and conveys the theme that love involves action instead of words.