Writing a Poetry Analysis

What is a Poetry Analysis?

Analysis means breaking something down and studying it closely in order to understand it better. For example, if you take apart a car engine, you can study its parts and figure out how they work individually and how they work together to move your car. Thus, you will break down a poem and study it closely to understand it better. Your understanding will become your thesis. Then, you will support your thesis.

Here is another way to think about analyzing a poem:

- The author of a poem is trying to communicate a message to the readers.
- Usually, the author’s message is not clearly stated. Thus, it is open to interpretation.
- After reading the poem, you must form an interpretation (what does it mean?).
- You must provide specific evidence from the poem that supports your interpretation.
- You must also explain why the evidence supports your interpretation and why your interpretation is significant (why does it matter to the reader of your analysis?).

To Begin Analyzing a Poem

- Identify the “speaker,” setting, tone, and theme of the poem.
  - Who is saying the poem? Where is the action in the poem taking place? How does the poem sound? Sad or angry or happy? What is the speaker of the poem trying to tell the reader?
- Examine the structure of the poem.
  - Which words rhyme or sound alike? Are they in a certain order? Are certain words repeated? How large are the stanzas? How are the stanzas shaped? How does the poem’s structure influence its meaning?
- Examine the language of the poem.
  - What images are described in the poem? What similes and metaphors are used? Is slang or formal language used? Do any words have double-meanings?

An effective Poetry Analysis will have the following:

- An introduction that
  - Identifies the title and author of the poem that is being analyzed
  - Provides necessary background information on the poem and its author
  - Summarizes the poem’s content, mood, and theme
  - States a clear, specific thesis statement that answers the questions, “What does the poem mean? What is it about the poem that makes you believe in that meaning?”
- Body paragraphs that
  - Begin with Topic Sentences that relate to the thesis and/or its specific details
  - Provide specific details and examples from the poem
  - Explain why the details and examples support the specific parts of the thesis
  - Cite and Introduce ALL direct quotations (word-for-word examples) and examples from the poem
  - Explain why ALL quotations and examples support the thesis
- A conclusion that
  - Restates the thesis
  - Summarizes the analysis of the poem